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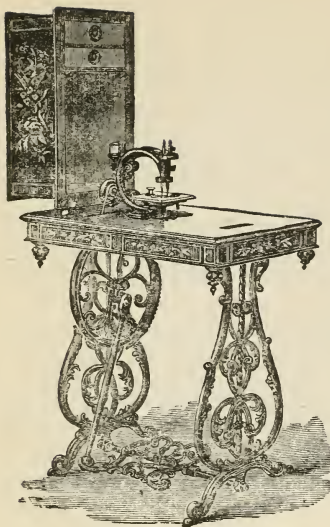
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IN THREE VOLUMES.

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"How readily we wish time spent revoked,
That we might try the ground again where once
Through inexperience (as we now perceive)
We missed that happiness we might have found!"

COWPER.

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YAXLEY & ITS NEIGHBOURHOOD.

CHAPTER I.

SOME UNPLEASANT REPORTS SPREAD ABOUT YAXLEY.

As soon as Lizette could compose herself to think of present things, she began to reflect upon what should now become of herself, and where she should go to. Of her own friendless condition, and the debt she owed to Mrs. Meiklam, she had long been aware ; and it did not enter her head to dream of the probability of her being provided for by the kind lady's will. A letter was imme-

diately despatched to Mr. Pilmer, who was Mrs. Meiklam's nearest living relative, and nothing was, of course, done about the funeral till he arrived from London. Doctor Ryder shut up all rooms where there were any papers and documents of importance, and locked them, as the will was not to be looked for till Mr. Pilmer came. People at Yaxley were in a high state of expectation and surmise about affairs at Meiklam's Rest. They were dying to know what would become of Miss Stutzer, and if the nice boy, Dillon Crosbie, who used to live at the Pilmers' long ago, was coming in for the property, as was anticipated formerly. Oh, it was all most interesting. Mrs. Ryder thought of asking poor little Lizette to come and stay at her home till she settled where she would finally go to; and she would have put the idea into execution, only for something Luke Bagly told the doctor, which the doctor told her.

“You see, sir,” said Luke, wiping his eyes, which did not need the operation, “that young lady wasn’t as prudent as you’d suppose from her demureness in public ; she gave Mrs. Meiklam great anxiety now and again. Shortly before she died, dear lady, she said to me here, in this very spot, ‘ Luke, I’m afraid I must still alter my will—I’m not satisfied with it—I don’t want to leave to unworthy young people more than they deserve ; and so if I burn this one as well as the last, don’t let Mr. Hill or any one be surprised ; only I’ll be sure to give yourself a couple of hundred pounds for a legacy, whatever may come.’ I’ve great reason to believe Miss Stutzer behaved ungrateful, latterly, to the mistress ; in fact, sir, I know they had a quarrel the very night she died, about some imprudent behaviour—walking out too late, or so—*and that’s a fact.* But where’s the use of my telling these

things now? It's all over, and my dear mistress can grieve nor fret no more."

"The devil!" exclaimed Doctor Ryder. "I would not believe any such stories, Bagly. If ever there was a pure-minded being in the world, Miss Stutzer's one of them. I'd stake my life on it."

"So I thought, doctor, for many a long day; and I'd gladly think it still. What is it to me whether the young lady is prudent or imprudent? I can gain no advantage by maligning her, or any one like her; but I like truth, Doctor Ryder."

"So do I," said the physician, drily, as he quitted Bagly's presence in disgust. As a piece of consummate impudence on Luke's part, Dr. Ryder told his wife of what he had said respecting Miss Stutzer, which she did not regard in the same light as her husband. At all events, she would now defer her invitation to her till the will

was read—when it would be proved if his words were correct. Somehow or other, it forthwith got rumoured about Yaxley and its neighbourhood, that Miss Stutzer had been acting a deceitful part for some years ; that she was carrying on a flirtation greatly to poor Mrs. Meiklam's annoyance—in short, that she broke her heart. The Miss Hilberts and Miss Ryders were much shocked ; but Doctor Ryder vowed openly it was all a confounded lie of Luke Bagly, whom he declared to be a perfect scoundrel. However, people only smiled incredulously when they heard him so vehemently taking the girl's part. It was natural that men should look leniently on faults which women were called upon to censure in one of their own sex. Poor Lizette, meanwhile, wept and mourned, and awaited the coming of Mr. Pilmer. Owing to his having been late for the train the first morning of setting out from London, this worthy, but indolent individual was

longer in arriving at Meiklam's Rest than had been expected; yet he came at last, looking pretty brisk, for there are some things that can even rouse an habitually lazy being from stupor. Very dull, indeed, must be the spirit that is not animated by the thoughts of rich relatives being dead, and of large sums of money, and unopened wills. Immediately on his arrival, search was made for the wondrous document, so long a mystery and a matter of conjecture. Very mysterious it was still—for it was nowhere to be found. High and low—in drawer and desk, in trunk and wardrobe, in the large book-cases, between the leaves of the books, in all places, possible and impossible—search was made, in vain. Mr. Hill, the lawyer, remembered drawing up a new will for Mrs. Meiklam some months previously, and John Bingham and a workman swore they had witnessed it; but what became of it nobody knew.

“Then, Mr. Pilmer, as it is most likely our friend burnt or otherwise destroyed her will, and therefore died intestate, you, as nearest relative and next of kin, must be her heir-at-law,” said Mr. Hill.

“Indeed—yes—so I believe : but I’m certain there’s a will, if it could only be found.”

“Mrs. Meiklam sometimes used to carry letters and papers in her pocket, going about the place,” suggested Bagly, mildly, “and maybe she lost it accidentally.”

“Pooh !” exclaimed Hill, contemptuously. “Very likely, indeed, that she would carry her will in her pocket ! No ; depend upon it the woman put in the fire. I knew when I made it there was where it would go. Didn’t I say so, Luke ?”

“Well, you did, sir, it’s a fact ; and I know it’s a great loss to me.”

“A loss to more than you,” said the lawyer,

significantly. "What in the world, Ryder, will become of that pretty little girl now?"

"It's a horrid business altogether," said the doctor, angrily.

"The will must be somewhere," said Mr. Pilmer in a drowsy tone; "couldn't there be some secret drawers or recesses in the house that nobody knows of?"

"The best plan," observed Doctor Ryder, "would be to act, Mr. Pilmer, as you think Mrs. Meiklam ought, and naturally wished to have acted."

"Very likely; but how in the world could any one possibly find out what she wished?"

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Mr. Hill, rubbing his hands.

"We all know what humanity is, Mr. Pilmer; and how wretched it will be for Miss Stutzer, brought up as she has been, to be left friendless and penniless all at once, at her age."

“Let her get a husband,” suggested Hill, chuckling; “she’s pretty enough to make a good match.”

Bagly laughed, too, for he was getting tired of feigning a grief he did not feel, except for selfish motives; and seeing that nothing was to be gained by deceit, his true nature was gradually revealing itself; so he began to enter into jokes about Miss Stutzer and the capricious old lady speaking grossly and irreverently of both even in presence of Doctor Ryder; for what was the physician to him? Luke always felt ready to snap his fingers at anybody who could be of no advantage to him—he was very independent when it suited him. And did not Mrs. Copley and all the house servants wonder what had come over him—he was grown so unmannerly, and insolent, and scoffing; blaspheming now and again, too, in a way never known before.

CHAPTER II.

MR. HILBERT HAS SOMETHING TO SAY TO

MRS. COPLEY.

MR. PILMER found it necessary to remain at Meiklam's Rest longer than he expected; but he bore it very well; in fact, he liked staying there, all was so quiet and dreamy. He was pleased at being put in possession of all Mrs. Meiklam's large property, though of what great use any further addition to his income would be to himself cannot be determined; for he could not eat more, or sleep more, or get more copies of the *Times*,

than he did before, and he took very little pleasure indeed in the gaieties that his wife and daughter enjoyed so much. But still, it was gratifying to get a large and unexpected sum of ready money, and to be master of Meiklam's Rest, and other estates. So he attended his old friend's funeral, with grave feelings of satisfaction, mingled with some sincere regrets for the deceased lady, and a few sombre thoughts upon the gloominess of being buried and leaving all the good things of this life; and he put crape on his hat, and ordered mourning, and paid the undertaker, and remained on at the Rest for many days, arranging matters. In the evenings, after dinner, he sat in the red room, sleeping very comfortably in the old-fashioned arm-chair, placed near the fire; for, though it was summer, he liked a fire; and poor Lizette Stutzer sat in the red room, too, not knowing whether she had any right to be there at all; yet unable, from habit,

to stay anywhere else. Some dreary thoughts crossed her mind that perhaps she should go down to Mrs. Copley's room below, and take her humble place there; but she could not do it—it was, yet, too hard to sink down into a low station. Occasionally, Mr. Pilmer tried to form some project respecting her future lot, for Doctor Ryder was unceasingly dinging it into his ears that she should be provided for. One day the physician had plainly asked him what the young girl was to do. “Do?” said Mr. Pilmer. “Really, I don't know; anything she likes; of course, I have no objection to her doing anything.”

“But you know she is quite friendless; the sudden death of her friend places her in a most embarrassing and painful position.”

“Yes, Mrs. Meiklam did wrong to bring her up as she did; but that is not the poor girl's fault.”

“No, certainly not, though it may prove her

misfortune ; yet, it would not take much to keep her from being thrown completely on the world. Five or six hundred pounds sunk upon her life, would insure her some independence.”

“ Yes, so it would ; and I ought to do something for Mrs. Meiklam’s sake—for the credit of her name, you may say—I am glad you suggested that. I’ll mention it to Mrs. Pilmer.”

“ Oh, Lord ! if you mention it to your wife it will fall to the ground,” shouted the doctor, bluntly.

“ No, it will not ; I will certainly remember Miss Stutzer ; she is a pretty, quiet girl ; she never disturbs me more than if she were a mouse.”

Doctor Ryder talked to his wife also, and besought her to ask the poor girl to Yaxley ; but Mrs. Ryder knew better than that ; she knew her son was the person suspected—indeed openly named—as the person with whom Lizette was

accused of flirting, contrary to Mrs. Meiklam's wishes; and though she might have been regarded as a good match for a young man formerly, she certainly was not so now; therefore she had no idea of paying her attention: it would be lowering herself and her daughters. Nobody knew whether Miss Stutzer would not have to turn a governess, if any one would take a giddy girl like her for one; and then how shocking it would be to have had her on a visit on terms of equality! And yet Mrs. Ryder was not a demoniac woman, with a sinister eye, or a dreadful expression of cunning, mingled with one of cruelty. No, she was a hearty, comely lady, very like a great many "excellent" wives and mothers, doing all she could for her own children; and very good-natured when it suited her to be so. She was unfailingly kind to the members of families who employed and fee'd her husband largely—she was, indeed; to do her every justice.

Mr. Hilbert was much grieved to hear the reports rife touching his quondam favourite, Lizette Stutzer ; but not being in the least simple-minded, like the favourite ideal of a country parson, he feared, nay, he believed the tales to be founded on something akin to fact. It is true that his own square-shouldered, red-faced daughters had never acted imprudently in their whole lives ; they had sewed, and read, and painted on canvas, and sung pretty airs, rather out of tune ; but then they were girls beyond comparison with any others. And so, he would either lecture the naughty young woman himself, or tell somebody else to do so. The deputy fixed upon, after due reflection, was Mrs. Copley, that highly respectable woman, who always wore such a proper, large black bonnet and sombre cloak on Sundays in church. Mr. Hilbert thought it his duty to visit Meiklam's Rest often at this gloomy time of death and burial (and he was curious, too

as to how temporal affairs were going on); so when he asked one day to see the housekeeper, she was not surprised.

“How are you, Mrs. Copley?” he said extending his hand with a bland smile to her. “I hope you are well.”

“Oh, as well as I can expect to be, considering my great trouble, sir,” replied the woman sorrowfully.

“We should not let our grief extend too far, Mrs. Copley,” returned the worthy pastor, shaking his head. “We must bear up cheerfully against every stroke of Providence. I wish to say a few words to you here, in private, about Miss Stutzer.”

“The poor lamb!” said Mrs. Copley, sadly.

“I am much pained to hear some reports about her which are spread at Yaxley—recollect I speak in confidence—respecting an imprudence of behaviour very sad in a young woman of her

age. It seems that she was in the habit of distressing Mrs. Meiklam, by carrying on a courtship in a clandestine and reprehensible manner, meeting in evenings in the woods, and all that."

"Lawks, sir! people were making fun of you, if they said that," exclaimed Mrs. Copley.

"It was not told merely to me; it is spread abroad everywhere," continued Mr. Hilbert, seriously, and looking rather annoyed. "It is well known that she and young Mr. Ryder have been flirting, as it is called, for many months." The Vicar found it hard to mention that undignified word "flirting."

"Well, and my goodness, sir, there's no harm in that!" said the housekeeper. "If young people are in love, nobody can help it."

"But they should not meet without the consent of their guardians in a clandestine manner," returned Mr. Hilbert, growing rather stern. "Miss Stutzer lays herself open to very unpleasant

remarks; in fact, she *has* laid herself open to them; and so I wish you, as a respectable and responsible matron, to warn her of the importance it is to her to preserve an unblemished reputation."

"Certainly, I will tell her of what you say, sir," said the surprised Mrs. Copley, "for, though I may run the risk of offending her, it's better to let her know what sort of a world it is."

And with this view Mrs. Copley actually did mention to poor Lizette all that Mr. Hilbert had said, and she was much surprised and grieved at the manner in which the young lady received the information. Instead of laughing at it as something absurd, as the housekeeper had hoped, Miss Stutzer trembled and grew pale. Humbled as she felt, she had no power to utter a word. Could Mrs. Meiklam have really believed her to have been guilty of light conduct or deceit? Why would the clergyman have spoken so of her, if he had not good reason and authority for his asser-

tions? Reports about her spread all through Yaxley! Very sorry, indeed, would Tom Ryder have been if he had known how much grief he had unwittingly caused the poor girl; but he heard nothing of her from home except vague accounts. His mother knew well that if he heard a whisper of such rumours as were afloat about her he would leave London and dash down to Yaxley, and, perhaps, propose for her at once; so it was well, to tell him nothing of them; and as it happened, she was perfectly right. Luke Bagly's wicked tongue was busy insinuating many false things, but somehow there were not many that put faith in his sayings; and at all events the young lady at the Rest had staunch adherents in Peggy Wolfe, Bingham, and Mrs. Copley. Also, poor crazy Jenny Black was full of bright prophecies that everything would yet turn out fortunate for her.

"Depend upon it, my jewel," said the de-

mented creature, as Lizette was walking with her in the woods, "you'll be rewarded for all your good deeds: and though you may be poor, as they say, and desolate, there's a blessing for you fathoms deep that 'ill be dug up one of these days."

"Not in this life, Jenny," said Lizette sorrowfully. "I cannot look for any good-fortune on earth."

"You mustn't doubt me, Miss Lizette," continued Jenny. "I won't bear that even from you—not from *you*. Tell me, Miss Stutzer," asked Jenny, lowering her voice and laying her hand softly on her arm—"tell me what's become of Miss Pilmer, the pretty young lady that used to be often here long ago?"

"She is going out in great company in London, Jenny," replied Lizette—"a beautiful young lady now—very rich and grand."

"I dreamed of her some nights ago," said the

woman, still speaking scarcely above a whisper, "and I saw her as clear as I see you now. She was here at the Rest ; but—oh, Miss Lizette, I daren't tell you any more. I would'nt scare you for the world. Do you think she will ever come back here ?"

"No, I do not think it likely."

"She'll come here yet—*she must*," murmured Jenny. "I never dreamed that dream for nothing. Look, Miss Lizette, I haven't sense like other people, and I am thought little more of than the wild beasts of the forest ; not half as much of as the horses and oxen in the fields. If I'm ill-used, who cares for it ? If I'm starving, who frets ? It's God's will. But I have an insight into things that no one else sees through. *I know what's coming.*"

"Poor creature !" thought Lizette, looking compassionately at her.

"You have a loving, pitiful eye, child, but you

needn't turn it on me now. I don't deceive myself. I'm not raving at all. But mark my words, Miss Pilmer must come back here sooner or later, and Heaven pity her when the time comes ! The old and hardened can bear trouble, Miss Lizette, for they're used to it—their hearts get horny like ; but God pity the young and tender—above all, the rich, that have to suffer what money nor rank can't cure, nor pride keep off. Money may be a fine thing sometimes, Miss Lizette ; but it's only a mock and a snare when you have got it and find that it can't save you from one mortal pain of mind or body."

CHAPTER III.

FAREWELLS.

MR. PILMER had come to a bold conclusion at last. He saw that nobody came forward to offer to take Miss Stutzer under their protection in all Yaxley and its neighbourhood ; and therefore he must make some arrangement about her himself. The Ryders, the Hilberts, all the aristocracy of the good little country town, looked coldly on the poor girl, so young and friendless, and, unless Mr. Pilmer exerts himself, she must launch out at once on the wide world. He did exert himself,

and had actually the temerity to determine he would bring her to London with him when he was returning there. Business at the Rest was nearly over ; the servants were to be discharged. and the house left, in silence and gloom, to the care of the gate-keeper. Luke Bagly had taken all that he could lawfully and unlawfully take from the farms. He had declared various horses and oxen belonged to himself, pretending they had been given him as presents by his mistress in her lifetime. He had whined and threatened Mr. Pilmer, till the latter granted him the hundred pounds which Mrs. Meiklam had really designed for him. He had sold unknown quantities of corn and wood from the estate, all in the space of a marvellously short time ; and then he departed on his way satisfied. Mr. Pilmer's communications to his wife, all through this exciting period, were of the most unsatisfactory description. He never answered any of the in-

numerable questions poured in upon him through her most voluminous epistles, and his letters rarely contained more than one or two lines. His first letter after his arrival at Meiklam's Rest ran thus :—

“MY DEAR MARY,—No will, and I am to have everything. Searched everywhere. No use.

Yours,

“ARTHUR PILMER.”

The second epistle was equally explicit :—

“MY DEAR MARY,—She was buried yesterday. Very busy. Tired to death.

Yours,

“ARTHUR PILMER.”

The third and last was as follows :—

“ MY DEAR MARY,—Things all arranged. Expect me Wednesday evening. London Bridge. Eight o'clock. Barham train. Bringing Miss Stutzer. Can't leave her here.

“ Yours,

“ ARTHUR PILMER.”

Mrs. Pilmer scarcely expected any better from her spouse than this sort of correspondence. It *was* enough for her to hear that there was no will; yet her good-humour was considerably damped by hearing that Miss Stutzer was about to be intruded on the goodly company at Markham House. Lizette had, certainly, lost her importance as an enemy, but still she was a “plague” in the lady's estimation. What could be done with her? Girls were so hard to get employment for—and then they were a horrible charge! Ah, if Mrs. Pilmer had know what the Yaxley people were saying, would she not have rejoiced?

When Mr. Pilmer mentioned to Lizette that he wished her to leave the Rest and accompany him to London, a vague horror stole over her. She had seen all her old friends depart from her. Mrs. Copley went to her relations in Staffordshire, Bingham got a situation in Gloucestershire, and Peggy Wolfe went near Westmoreland. The rest of the servants were scattered likewise, most probably never to meet upon earth again. All had parted from Lizette with tears of real grief—all except Luke Bagly, who never bade her adieu at all. And now she was alone, with more than mere sorrow for her dear friend to make her weep bitter tears. But she must be brave, and bear her lot, whatever it is to be. There were some friends in the neighbourhood of the Rest who were still sorry to think of her leaving them; these were the halt, the feeble, the old, and the invalid, whom she had been wont to comfort and console. Many parting blessings were poured

upon her ; many a white-haired man and woman wept when she came to say good-bye ; many a gay young peasant girl looked sorrowful, too ; and the girls of her Sunday-school class brought her offerings of their own needlework as gifts of remembrance, shedding tears as she shook each one by the hand for the last time. Doctor Ryder bade her adieu with much emotion. He had long looked upon her as one of those bright beings sometimes, but unfortunately rarely, to be met with in the world, in whom good-nature and kindness, mingled with good sense and purity of thought, seemed thoroughly to exist at all times.

“ God bless you, Miss Stutzer,” he said, wringing her small hand in his own of giant size, on the last evening of her stay at the Rest ; “ and if ever you are in any distress or difficulty, or want of assistance, just write to me and tell me all about it. I am a father and getting an old man,

and you need never feel awkward in confiding in me."

"Thanks—many thanks, my dear sir," said Lizette, gratefully; "this is, indeed kind of you "

The physician shed some tears as he went home after that parting; and then Lizette ran out to look once more, in the shadowy light of the summer evening, at the haunts familiar since early childhood—through the bushy gardens, where the young fruit hung green on the trees, and the perfume of roses loaded the air; round the shaded ponds, where the swans that knew her call were resting on the still waters; down through bosky dingles, and up over green slopes. Farewell, loved scenes—farewell! Nevermore can you be what you once were, in the eyes of her who breathes her adieux in the twilight hour!

But this parting is not for ever, Lizette. The

dark web is progressing steadily and surely, determined to wind itself round many people. You will yet again be at Meiklam's Rest when the old house will stand under the shadow of such a gloom as never overspread it before. Speak not of the future, wind of the summer night; breathe no whisper of coming events. Come out, pale stars, and shine softly; let peace reign while it may. Tell not of shame or woe, or wailings of agony, that might make the woods and the walls of the old house tremble. Tell not of retribution, or stricken conscience, or heavy punishment. Let the gentle mourner take her farewells quietly. Raise not the veil drawn over the future.

CHAPTER IV.

THE JOURNEY TO LONDON.

MR. PILMER was less fidgetty than any man or woman in the kingdom; he never hurried himself or his friends upon any occasion, in the least degree, for which reason he was frequently late for coaches, trains, and steamboats; nevertheless, Lizette and he contrived to arrive at Yaxley in time for the starting of the "Swift Hawk," with actually a minute to spare, on the morning appointed for their journey to London; and our young friend found herself, for the first time since

she was a very little child indeed, travelling in a public conveyance. She did not dislike the movement of the vehicle ; it was pleasant to gallop by all the strange places passed on the way ; and she did not mind the jolting, nor the occasional leaning to one side of the heavily-laden vehicle, which stopped ever and anon to pick up a passenger or a hand-box in waiting for it on some lonely country road. She wondered at all the strange faces she saw—wondered at their different expressions—some sad, some merry, some stamped with a look of grave, hard thought, but all lighted up by the living soul within. It almost seemed to her that these strange people had only now started into existence for her peculiar benefit. She could scarcely comprehend that each new person had a home, and friends, and interests of his own, and that all had lived in the world long before that bright June day which first revealed them to her eyes. Every one

appeared busy, bustling, careful of self. Mr. Pilmer, however, was an exception; he took things easily, snoring away on the opposite seat; so she had plenty of time to make observations, no one being inside the coach but herself and her companion. Very little conversation had been exchanged between her and Mr. Pilmer since his coming to the Rest. She had not dared to talk to him on terms of equality; she had scarcely summoned courage to ask about his daughter Bessie; no longer "Bessie" to her she feared, but Miss Pilmer, cold, and stately, and forgetful of the past. Oh, how dreadful to have to meet either her or her mother! These thoughts occasionally floated through her mind, as, with head turned towards the open coach window, she watched passengers getting up and down, playing out the day's drama, and ostlers bringing out horses when the coach stopped at wayside inns, to exchange the tired, gaunt animals, that

were exhausted and panting after bearing the weighty coach-load, mile after mile, at a quick pace, for others no less gaunt, but not so weary ; and she heard the coachman swear at the horses ; and once a great volley of oaths was poured out on a stable-boy, who happened to be stupidly setting one of the leaders restive. In what frightful language the poor lad was desired to go to perdition, and denounced with Heaven's vengeance because the old gaunt horse was twisting his bony body about, and refusing to go on ! Ah, yes, Lizette, you had yet to learn that God's name was oftener taken in vain than in any other way. The coachman, with his dull light eyes and red face, was not the only man in the world that swore upon every trivial occurrence. For many miles the Yaxley coach bore our travellers along ; and it was far advanced in the warm summer day when they arrived at the Barham Railway Station, where they were to take the

train for London. What puffing and panting, screaming and whistling there was here! What crowds of people hurrying to the long train waiting to start! Lizette was bewildered, and even Mr. Pilmer had to look sharply about him. They were soon in a comfortably-cushioned carriage, steaming on towards the metropolis. How Lizette's heart beat and sank lower and lower at the thought of this great London! Nothing could be seen of the country now—nothing distinctly; for swift as the wind the train rushed on. They stopped at a few stations on the way and upon reaching the small town of Wedmington, where the train was to stop for a little time longer than elsewhere, Mr. Pilmer got out to procure an ice and to walk about. He asked Lizette if she would also alight and get some refreshment, but she preferred remaining where she was. Now, there was a certain little bag containing important documents—copies of leases,

deeds, and other law papers—which Mr. Pilmer had carried on his lap during all the journey; and even now, when getting out of the train, he conveyed this precious bag with him.

“You will have some time to spare, I suppose,” Lizette had ventured to say.

“Yes, some minutes; but I had better take care and not run the risk of losing my place, as no other train will leave Wedmington for several hours.”

Lizette watched the people passing to and fro on the platform near her, shrinking occasionally back as some bold eye fixed itself impertinently on her face, and had time to make sundry observations before the first bell rang out its warning that the train was soon again to be in motion. She now looked out rather anxiously for Mr. Pilmer, whom she did not yet see among those hurrying towards the carriages. The last bell sounded forth its peal. She was really growing

uneasy ; but she soon espied him making his appearance with all haste. He was just about to enter the carriage, when, suddenly, with an exclamation, " Oh, I have forgotton the bag ! " he darted back towards the station. Lizette grew very anxious indeed. There was no time to spare. The porters were shutting to the doors with great bangs ; the engine shrieked ; the driver sent forth a shrill whistle ; and just as Mr. Pilmer emerged from the station, the train was off.

And now Lizette was alone, without money, and not knowing how she could dare to present herself at Markham House without the protection of its master. She had received no invitation from its mistress to make her home a refuge. She had not been sent a message of condolence even by Bessie ; and besides this, the Pilmers lived far from the city ; their house was situated in the suburbs. How could she reach it ? Cabs in abundance might be at her command ; but how

very awkward for her to procure one, and drive to Markham by herself, and to be obliged to ask Mrs. Pilmer to pay the cab fare, and then to enter into explanations as to how her escort had missed the train at Wedmington. It was altogether most embarrassing. Reviewing all things in her mind, she came to the conclusion that she would wait at the London Bridge Station till the next train from Wedmington should arrive, bringing Mr. Pilmer. Now it was that perhaps she felt for the first time, in all the force of reality, what a thing it was to be alone in the world without friends, and without money—alone in the great busy, bustling, heartless world, where no one seemed to care about the other, where everybody appeared to consider that selfishness, cunning, and distrust of his fellow-man was wisdom. If there is one thing above another that brings us palpably and glaringly into contact with undisguised selfishness, it is certainly travelling in public convey-

ances, where the *saufe qui peut* system prevails most heartily. With a beating heart and pale face, Lizette left the train, and stood, in the warm evening, on the platform of the London-bridge station, with crowds jostling past her, and porters hurrying by to execute the commands of impatient travellers. All at once she recollected that her own luggage and that of Mr. Pilmer was in the train, but her timidity and ignorance prevented her being able to command the notice of any porter, where all were so busy in attending to the orders of bolder and more experienced wayfarers. A fat, elderly woman was hurrying by her, when she seized the opportunity of accosting her, and asking if she would be kind enough to get some one to call a porter for her, adding that she found it impossible to procure one for herself.

“That’s very odd,” replied the woman, staring doubtfully at her, and pressing her hands on

her pockets in terror ; “there, can’t you see for one yourself, they’re plenty enough, I’m sure !” and she hurried speedily on. Why is it that beauty so often lays its possessor, when a woman, open to suspicion and doubt ? Does it not seem to argue too little faith in the power of resisting temptation ? Had Lizette been an ugly girl, that woman would not have distrusted her nearly so much ; as it was, she looked upon her with a sort of horror—and she may have been an honest woman too—just because she was unprotected and very lovely. The poor girl turned away sorrowfully, and was growing most despondent, when a voice that caused her to start, though at the time she scarcely knew why, accosted her, “May I call a porter for you ?” was asked in rich musical tones, as a gentleman advanced and stood beside her.

CHAPTER V.

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING.

HE had heard her accost the fat, ungracious woman, and he had also heard the answer she received. More deeply skilled in the expressions of the human face—at least of female faces—than the worthy and prudent old soul who wished to preserve herself from possible contamination, this man knew well that the fair young girl, standing alone and bewildered in the crowd, was no impostor, seeking assistance under false pretensions. If women possess intuition as regards

the characters of men, so, on the other hand, do men sometimes possess unerring insight into the characters of women. This gift of discernment is mutual, and natural.

“Thank you,” replied Lizette, “I will, indeed, feel obliged if you call one.”

As the gentleman passed before her on his expedition of discovery, she had an opportunity of seeing what his appearance was like. He was young, tall, and of goodly presence, walking erect, with a military bearing, but of easy and elegant deportment. He made his way through the crowd like one who could well buffet his way through life. Lizette watched him as he went on, and wondered at the courage of men, though, after all, why should she wonder? What had they to fear, with only men to contend against like themselves; while women were so much weaker that it was difficult for them to push through a world where there were so many beings

stronger than themselves. No, she would cease to wonder, but she felt very glad to receive a man's assistance at the present time.

The gentleman soon came forward with a porter who was desired to attend her, and in thanking him, Lizette raised her eyes to his face, but lowered them quickly again, on perceiving that his own clear and penetrating orbs were resting on her features. She turned at once to seek the luggage with the porter, and was fortunately able from memory to recognise Mr. Pilmer's portmanteau and travelling-bag, for neither bore any name or address; and having desired them to be placed somewhere in safety, as she was not to leave the station for some time, she proceeded to wait patiently for further good inspirations. On approaching again the station she observed that the gentleman who had procured the porter for her was still sauntering up and down as if waiting for some one. Something in his appear-

ance struck her forcibly ; it was chiefly the expression of his eye. She was busy with strange fancies and surmises, when the object of her attention was approached and accosted by a friend who appeared *en scene*, looking cool, careless, and as if he had not been lately travelling.

“How do, Crosbie? Just arrived, I suppose?”

“Yes ; I came by the train from Chatham five minutes or so ago ; and I turned in here to look for my uncle, who I heard was coming up from Barham by the seven o’clock train ; but I don’t see him anywhere. Have you met him?”

“No ; I came to drive you and him down to Markham ; but it seems he has not made his appearance, though the Barham train has just arrived.”

Lizette lingered there, listening with interest ; she now knew that the surmises which she had fancied wild and improbable were correct. Her

memory had not deceived her ; it was, indeed, Dillon Crosbie who stood there before her. Very much changed he was, yet still bearing in his appearance a great deal that recalled what he had been as a boy. He was now a fashionable looking young man, dressed with quiet elegance ; his boots were small, but only duly proportioned to the size of the feet they encased ; his hair, that used to be so uncared for, was now arranged with due regard to the fashionable order of the day ; he wore a military undress cap, that most becoming of all head-gear, when the face beneath is young and handsome, and very handsome indeed, was the face of Dillon Crosbie. His features were much like what they had been years ago, only, of course, more manly looking ; the upper lip was still as finely chiselled, the nose as straight and well shaped, the forehead as well formed as in days of boyhood—the smile, above all, was the

same as of old—frank and bright; yet the expression of the face, in repose, bore a matured, thoughtful, almost sad cast, that it did not wear in early youth. Feelings, passions, though still slumbering, or in a quiescent state, had left their impress, nevertheless, on the countenance of the man, unknown to that of the boy. Whatever was gained, there was certainly nothing lost of depth or sentiment in the expression of the face that Lizette had so easily recognised. His friend who stood beside him was not so good looking; he was older, too, and decidedly of an unpleasant cast of face; his eye was the eye of a cynic—but that only appeared when it was wider open than the owner usually allowed it to be; he had evidently seen a good deal of life, and mixed much with a certain description of his fellow-men, who had taught him to distrust mankind in general. Very low, indeed, was this individual's

estimate of human nature ; of the worst side of it he may have judged pretty correctly ; but the better side had either been always turned from him, or passed by unheeded. Lizette always lowered her eyes before the gaze of this man, and very often it was fixed upon her face with a scrutinizing stare, such as no drawing-room belle ever saw in his eyes, though it may have been familiar enough to sundry milliners' apprentices and ladies' maids. He said something in a low tone to his companion in which the words " pretty " and " girl " were audible, and Dillon for an instant glanced at the figure of Lizette, who still lingered at a distance, uncertain what to do ; but he turned once again to talk of indifferent subjects to his friend, whom Lizette soon heard speak thus : " Mr. Pilmer was to bring some young woman from Yaxley, I believe, and Mrs. Pilmer expected them both punctually this evening ; but we need not wait here for them any

longer. Jeffreys and the phaeton are outside. Are you ready to start, Crosbie?"

"Now," thought Lizette, "if I could only summon up courage to speak to Dillon Crosbie and tell him who I am, how well it would be;" but the disagreeable eyes of his companion made her tremble. How could she endure his stare of wonder, even for an instant, if she advanced to speak to Mr. Crosbie? That man had called her a "young woman," as if she were a servant; he must have heard her spoken of at Markham House in terms that did not inspire him with any other idea of her. Poor Lizette felt mortified for a few seconds, but not longer. "I must be humble," she said to herself, endeavouring to quiet the proud swelling of her heart. Oh, very hard it was for her to bear the thoughts flitting through her aching brain, as she stood there, in the fading light of the summer evening, unprotected and embarrassed. The young men

were moving away ; in her despair, and having no more time to reflect, or battle with herself, she approached them, colouring very much and then turning pale.

CHAPTER VI.

THE ARRIVAL AT MARKHAM HOUSE.

WITH all the quiet dignity she could command she introduced herself to Mr. Crosbie, presuming he was Mr. Pilmer's nephew, and explaining in few words how his uncle had missed the train at Wedmington, which placed her in rather an awkward position. The politeness and quick comprehension of young Crosbie spared her any further embarrassment; he understood at once all that she had endeavoured to say with so much pain and timidity, and appeared to think it the

most natural thing in the world that things should have so happened. Too well-bred to let it appear that he was in the least amused at his uncle's usual luck of being late, he did not even smile, though the faintest spark of humour flashed for an instant in his dark eye. Neither would he confuse the young girl by too much show of attention; he knew it would be more agreeable to her to treat her as a rational being, merely wanting rational assistance, than with any mark of ostentatious gallantry. While she was speaking to him his companion was looking at her with eyes curiously contracted, thinking she was quite a spirited little girl, and uncommonly pretty, and he smiled at the cordiality of young Crosbie's manner when he found out who she was. He took an opportunity soon of asking her name, which he had not caught from her own lips. Dillon told it to him in a low tone.

“Stutzer,” repeated the man inquiringly. “Is

she the little girl who was at Meiklam's Rest some years ago, when I was at Yaxley?"

"Yes. She is the daughter of a person whom I valued much in boyhood, and whose memory is still very dear to me," replied Crosbie, with the shadow crossing his face that sometimes crossed it in these days of sober manhood; the shadow that comes oftener and oftener as years roll on and then rests for ever on the furrowed brow, till death smooths it away. "He was an humble man, highly gifted, but frowned on by fortune—poor Paul Stutzer!"

Dillon's companion struck his boot with his cane, and looked upon the ground, nor did he speak again till Crosbie went to procure Lizette's luggage and have it placed in the carriage waiting outside the railway station. It was a light open phaeton, pleasant for that hazy evening, so warm and sultry. Dillon handed in Lizette and then sat beside her himself, while his friend drove the

carriage, sitting on the box beside a somewhat dandified servant, not at all like the sober coachman at Meiklam's Rest. Tired and jaded as she was, she leaned back in the vehicle, now and then looking at her companion's face with curious eyes, wondering if he was the same in heart as he used to be in those old days long ago, when he drew pictures of lions and panthers for her, pictures which were still preserved among treasures of the past ; or when he watched that never-to-be-forgotten night beside her dying father, when neither he nor she spoke a word to each other all through those lonely, frightful hours. She thought she saw him again as he was that night in the dim room of death, now putting coals on the fire, now snuffing the long wick of the tallow candle, now standing noiselessly beside the bed. Was he changed in heart since that time ? She could not tell ; she saw that his figure was changed, his face was a little altered, too, it was

paler than formerly, and the white hand occasionally raised to push his cap a little off his forehead did not look like the red, scared boy's hand that had drawn the pictures for her long ago. She could not help feeling fearful and shy, sitting there beside him, for he seemed a stranger to her now. He spoke of Yaxley and Mrs. Meiklam. "I never heard of her death till she was in her grave," he said, speaking gravely. "I only arrived about a fortnight ago from Gibraltar on leave, and I have been at Chatham for the last few days with a friend at the dépôt."

"Then you have not yet been to see your friends in London, since your arrival in England?"

"Oh, yes; I spent a week with them before running down to Chatham."

He then told how he happened to hear his uncle was to be at the London-bridge station much about the same hour that he himself arrived

there from Chatham, and that he should have met him there that evening. Lizette felt a little constrained ; she could not ask about Miss Pilmer ; she dared not ; she knew they stood no longer on an equality in a worldly point of view. Long ago, she had never thought whether they were equals or not ; they were both children then ; they were now grown up, and that made a great difference in their relative positions. Dillon did not mention his cousin either ; indeed he did not speak much about anything.

Now and then his friend on the box-seat turned round to make an observation to him, and perhaps to have a look *en passant* at the sweet face beside him—for Sir James Bend could admire a great many pretty faces at the same time. How noisy and busy London was, even now, at an hour when rather empty as regarded fashionable equipages ; very different from the stillness of little Yaxley. When the city was left behind and the carriage

drove into quieter localities Lizette felt less bewildered ; the air grew fresher as she came within view of detached villas in the suburbs, but again her heart palpitated violently as the vehicle stopped at the gate of Markham House. The house stood in a pretty lawn where a few trees and shrubs of low growth greeted the eye pleasantly. The grass plots looked green, and there was altogether something refreshing in the aspect of this half-town, half-country dwelling.

The carriage entered the gateway and drove up the gravelled sweep to the entrance door. The young girl felt almost faint as Dillon Crosbie handed her out ; her head was giddy ; her heart still throbbing ; oh, it required a great deal of heroism to bear up against the many feelings that now oppressed her. How would she be received ? Would she be welcome at this house, her only present refuge ? A nightmare seemed upon her ; she saw the horses nodding their heads, and Sir

James Bend striking the dust from his boots with his cane ; she saw the blue sky above her, and heard Dillon giving directions to have the luggage brought in ; all was confusion for a few seconds. The hall-door was opened—some one ran down the steps quickly.

CHAPTER VII.

A DEAR FRIEND'S WELCOME.

SHE was clasped in somebody's arms, fervently, most fervently.

"My dear Lizette!"

"Oh, Bessie!"

Were words uttered with emotion on both sides, as Lizette leaned confidently on the bosom of her early friend. She knew at once she was not forgotten.

Beautiful, more beautiful than ever was Bessie Pilmer now—tall, graceful as in days of child-

hood; every charm she had possessed in early youth was enhanced by the perfecting hand of maturity. She seemed radiant and bright as an ideal picture; and as she saw before her the gentle girl whom she had loved so well, and who was so little altered in the years that had elapsed since their separation, a host of recollections started up, chiding her for much past negligence. Miss Pilmer wore a silk dress of a slight mourning colour, her hair was not curled as of old, but drawn in wavy bands off her face, displaying the perfect form of her head.

“I ought to feel ashamed to look you straight in the face, my dearest little Lizette!” she said blushing slightly, when the first greeting was over; “but though I did not write to you myself I often thought of you, and I always desired mamma to give you hundreds of kind messages, but I dare say she forgot them. She often neglects to do what I ask.”

Lizette had not received any messages from Bessie through Mrs. Pilmer's letters to Meiklam's Rest for the last three years. But was not the past all forgotten and forgiven now when that silvery voice was pouring forth apologies in such sweet tones?

Bessie's greeting of her cousin, Dillon Crosbie, was very warm; and he spoke of how well she looked, and laughed with her, saying he liked her hair arranged in bands better than in curls, as the former allowed the contour of her head to be seen, adding that it looked like a Greek model now; and Bessie smiled very brightly as she took his arm and mounted the hall-door steps. Lizette felt more at her ease than she had expected to feel; and even when Mrs. Pilmer, very stately and grand, gave her a cold shake of the hand, and inquired about her husband, whom Bessie had quite forgotten to ask for, she was able to answer her questions courageously. How scornful

was the expression of Mrs. Pilmer's face when she learned how it happened that her better-half had not arrived ; but she did not openly remark upon the subject, for she had given up scolding so much as formerly, her daughter having requested her to take things coolly in the approved fashionable style ; and, therefore, she was less brawling and noisy, but not a bit better-tempered than she used to be in days "lang syne" at Yaxley. It was quite evident that Bessie had her own way on all occasions, still as much as ever ; and she chose to be very attentive to Miss Stutzer, ordering her own maid to wait upon her, and doing a great deal for her herself also.

" I think very often of Meiklam's Rest," she said, as they talked together in her own dressing-room, " and now I regret so much that I never accepted any of Mrs. Meiklam's kind invitations to go there from London. Mamma used so to press me to go ; but I had always something else

to occupy me. I dreaded spending a winter in the country, and then we used to go to Harrogate, or some other watering place every summer, leaving the spring for town. I am sorry now that I never met my dear old friend for five long years !”

And thus she talked on, sometimes mournfully, sometimes gaily, but always with a charm that fascinated Lizette, who, however, could not help fancying there was something feverish in Bessie’s animation, especially at dinner, when she talked to Sir James Bend, who sat beside her.

After dinner, that evening, there was a large party at Markham House, and, in spite of her fatigue, Miss Stutzer felt obliged to sit up late “enjoying” the company of a great many strangers who whirled about the room, waltzing and *galoping* with marvellous spirit. She took part in a quadrille once or twice, and then sat still ; for Mrs. Meiklam had not approved of

what are termed "the fast dances." Occasionally Dillon Crosbie sat beside her when he did not choose to seek a partner for a waltz or polka.

"How beautiful Miss Pilmer is," she said at one time, as Bessie whirled past in a waltz with Sir James Bend.

"Yes, very handsome indeed; she was always pretty—now she is superb," replied Dillon.

"Does her sister often see her family now?"

"No, I think not; she and Mrs. Devenish have been travelling abroad for some time; they have been all over the Continent, and are now gone with friends to Egypt."

It seemed strange to poor Lizette, the idea of anyone going to Egypt, which was chiefly connected in her mind with thoughts of Pharoah and the Red Sea, and the Captivity of the Jews; but rich people might travel where they pleased.

"How very quiet you are," said Bessie, advancing towards her cousin and Lizette when the

waltz was over. "Why are you not dancing, coz?" she asked with a sweet smile.

"I cannot persuade Miss Stutzer to waltz, and nearly all the people here are unknown to me."

"Then we shall have a waltz together when the music begins again," said Bessie, sitting down. Sir James had followed her and stood near, conversing with her in low tones.

Again the music began—partners were preparing for a *galop*—Sir James begged Miss Pilmer's hand again.

"No, I am engaged to my Cousin Dillon," she replied; and, without waiting for Crosbie to rise, she started up, telling him she was ready to begin the dance. He got up, and they took their places.

Very gracefully they both danced, for both were elegant. Lookers on admired them, thinking they would be well matched as partners for life. Sir James Bend looked on also, and

thought Miss Pilmer really was a fine looking girl, and Crosbie handsome, too, and aristocratic looking. He did not care for dancing himself, so he sat down and talked to Lizette, who endeavoured to check the dislike that stole over her every time this man approached her. He asked her a few questions relative to Yaxlay, and if she recollected where she had lived previous to her arrival there. "Scarcely at all," replied she; "of my life in the north of England I retain but a very shadowy remembrance, though its moors and barren heaths seem still familiar to me. It is curious, but I think I recollect having heard my father or mother often speak of the name of *Bend*," she added, smiling faintly, and speaking musingly.

Sir James looked steadily at her face for a few moments, and then dropped his eyes on the carpet.

She was soon so much fatigued, that when

Bessie again came near enough to give her an opportunity of speaking to her, she expressed a wish to retire for the night. Miss Pilmer accompanied her to her room, and, as they were ascending the stairs, Lizette was surprised to meet Mr. Pilmer, coming down with a candle in his hand, looking rather out of sorts.

“Dear papa,” said Bessie, who had not before known of his arrival, though it took place some hours ago, “I was not aware that you had come.”

“Oh, I suppose not: with all the fine company you have below, you quite forgot your old papa. Where is your mother? I can’t find anything! everything is upside down; I can’t find my slippers; I don’t know where a single thing is! Why could you not have kept this party for another night?”

“It is only a few friends that were invited a few days ago,” said Bessie, apologetically.

“Oh, how I detest ‘a few friends,’ I had rather

see a great many enemies ! Everything is most uncomfortable ; I have no fire in my room, I can't get a servant to attend me !” And in a deplorable state of helplessness, the poor man went down stairs looking really miserable.

“ Papa hates gaiety,” said Bessie, by way of explanation to Lizette ; “ he hardly ever comes into the drawing-room when there is a party.”

“ Then he must be very unhappy when there is company.”

“ Oh, no ; mamma and I never mind him ; he goes to bed very contentedly ; but to-night he is cross because, I suppose, he is tired ; a good sleep will quite refresh him.”

With a faint notion that there was not much happiness for Mr. Pilmer at home, Lizette now wished her friend “ good night,” and found herself alone in her room.

CHAPTER VIII.

REMINISCENCES.

NEXT morning she awoke far later than usual; but found, on rising, that the house was very quiet and no one, as yet, astir, but the servants. The breakfast hours ranging from eleven till half-past one or so in the afternoon, had not yet arrived, so she thought of taking a little walk in the grounds outside the house; for the morning air wafted through her open window was fresh and fragrant, loaded with the perfume of mignonettes from the parterres below. Putting on

her wide-brimmed hat, which she had been accustomed to wear at Meiklam's Rest, she descended the stairs and was soon out upon the lawn, where the sun was shining as brightly as ever it shone in the heart of the country. She could hardly believe that London with its din and smoke was so near. After walking a short way through a little shrubbery, she came to a gate which stood open as a man was passing out with a wheel-barrow ; and seeing gay flowers blooming within, she knew it was the garden. With a glad heart she entered it, for those bright roses and tulips were like old friends. After examining a few rare kinds of flowers minutely, she sat down on a rustic chair and began to form some plans for her own future life, which might enable her to leave Markham House as speedily as possible. Her father had long worked humbly for his bread : why should not she ? Very thankful she felt now, that Mrs. Meiklam had so

kindly educated her in such a way as to render her competent to become a respectable teacher; she understood French, German, and Italian, and she was a good musician also; while, in other branches of knowledge, she was likewise well-skilled. Thus she sat musing, when Dillon Crosbie came into the garden to walk about and smoke a cigar; he did not see her for some time as he was at a distance going up and down a long, broad, level walk. She watched him as he went to and fro; he was dressed in negligent morning costume, which looked quite as well as his dress of the previous evening. As soon as he caught sight of Miss Stutzer in the arbour, he flung away his cigar and came towards her.

“There is no one up yet, but you and me, I believe,” he said, taking out his watch, and smiling a little as he saw the hour the hands were pointing at.

“What o’clock is it?”

He showed her the watch, and she saw that it was nearly a quarter past eleven ; she returned his smile, and, pulling a little bit of woodbine from the arbour, he sat down near her. Lizette could not help looking again at him to trace the likeness he bore to his boyish self ; she wondered if he recollected the events that had happened ten years ago as well as she did ; but she had not to remain long in doubt upon that head, for he opened the subject of the past himself.

“ Do you recollect me as a boy, Miss Stutzer ? ” he asked, pulling the piece of woodbine to pieces.

“ Yes, very well indeed ; my memory would be very bad if I did not.”

“ There are many people who could not remember so long ; besides you were only a very little child in those days. For my own part, I think I should have almost known you anywhere without hearing your name ; you are not much altered since you were a child ; but it is true that I

have a memory that astonishes many of my friends; something extraordinary they say it is."

"It could not be better in some respects than mine," said Lizette, as a faint glow came over her face, and a kindling light burnt in her eye.

"I could never forget your kindness to my dear father, nor how great a favourite you were of his."

Dillon looked on the ground for a little while without speaking, and then pointed to a ring that he wore. "This little gift has been as a talisman to me for many years," he said, smiling; "your father gave it to me very soon before his death, and I have worn it almost ever since. I scarcely ever look at it without recollecting the person who bestowed it on me; perhaps it is because I have received so few presents in my life that this one has made so much impression on me."

“Ah, indeed, Mr. Crosbie,” said a voice speaking merrily, as the owner of it drew near unperceived, “and so I suppose all my presents of endless slippers and smoking-caps are considered as nothing,” and laughing gaily Miss Pilmer stood before Lizette and Dillon, interrupting their short *tête-à-tête*. “Good morning, good people; you see I won’t allow any flirting or love-making in my dominions; you have been talking of old times of course?”

“We have scarcely had time to say anything whatever,” said Dillon looking rather saucy.

“Then it is so much the better. Nothing is so dangerous as touching upon the past, especially before breakfast,” continued Bessie, laying her fair hand on her cousin’s shoulder. “Had I not arrived so opportunely one or other would have been sure to fall in love.”

Lizette smiled, but if Dillon expected her to blush he was disappointed, for the delicate colour

on her cheek did not deepen its shade in the least.

“My little seraph here must think us all savages and heathens,” said Bessie, smiling brightly upon Lizette.” “What would dear old Mrs. Meiklam have said if she knew you were kept waiting till noontide for your breakfast?”

“You should commence a reformation most truly, Bessie,” said Dillon; “half your life is wasted away in a most unprofitable manner.”

“Ah, and if it was *all* wasted so, of what consequence would it be?” returned Miss Pilmer, sighing, and not looking as if she were jesting.

Lizette looked reproachfully and sorrowfully at her.

“You are just the same as you ever were!” exclaimed Bessie, who understood the glance of the soft, pitying eyes turned upon her; “and, dear Lizette, bad as I was in old times, I am far worse now; oh, far worse! Dillon knows what

a wretched cousin he possesses; you have heard him preaching the necessity of a reformation."

"However, I had better learn to practise before I preach," said Dillon, leaning back in his rustic chair.

"Miss Stutzer will teach us both how to conduct ourselves soberly, honestly, and quietly, as we say in the servants' discharges," observed Bessie, passing her hand over Lizette's soft hair.

"I am afraid she will have hard work, Bessie," remarked Dillon, looking at Miss Stutzer's fair face, with a contemplative, almost tender expression. She looked troubled and sorrowful.

"It is her vocation, cousin," said Bessie; "she never did anything but preach and try to make me a good girl all the time she was at Meiklam's Rest, while I was at Yaxley. I am afraid she cried over my short-comings more than once. Lizette, do you remember how you used to despair about me?"

“Come, let us go to breakfast,” said Dillon, who saw Miss Stutzer did not enjoy Bessie’s light way of speaking upon serious subjects; “Mrs. Pilmer must surely have made her appearance by this time.”

They all went towards the house and found breakfast waiting them. Mrs. Pilmer presided at the table with a dignified asperity of expression, and in a coldly polite way asked Miss Stutzer how she slept, without attending to the answer. Mr. Pilmer was there, looking rather fatigued and not very well. Bessie alone, of all at the table, seemed in high spirits, talking chiefly to Lizette and Dillon; but the former remarked that once or twice Bessie’s eyes suddenly filled with tears which were hastily wiped away.

CHAPTER IX.

MISS PILMER'S CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION.

FOR some days Lizette found it impossible to speak about leaving Markham; every one there seemed in a perpetual state of commotion except when asleep. The late risings, the drives in the park, the receiving and paying of visits, the tedious dinners, gave Mrs. Pilmer and her daughter no time to hear what she had to say of a business-like nature. She waited patiently, therefore, for a fitting opportunity of consulting one or other upon what she ought to do towards

her future maintenance. Miss Pilmer was invariably kind to her, but still she felt that she must leave Markham.

Sir James Bend dined nearly every day at the house, and Lizette began to wonder if he were any relative of the family. One day, when she and Bessie happened to be alone together in the garden, the latter asked her what she thought of Sir James.

“To tell the truth, I don’t much like him,” replied Lizette.

“Why?” asked Bessie, smiling curiously, and looking decidedly amused.

“I do not think he is a good man; I may be wrong, but then I must express my opinion candidly.”

“But you have no reason for your suspicions, my little friend. Sir James, you know, is a man of the world; he has been brought up in a school that teaches people to distrust and become cynical.

If he entertains a bad estimate of human nature, perhaps he is not far wrong."

"I know little of the world, Bessie ; but I feel glad that I am ignorant, if to have a knowledge of it is to make one doubtful of all sincerity and goodness."

"There may be *some* sincerely good and humane people," said Bessie ; "but very few, I fear ; high and low, rich and poor, seem all working alike for self-interest. The servant seeks to overreach and supplant his fellow-servant ; the tradesman his rival ; aye, even where you would naturally expect honour and honesty, there is deceit and underhand dealing ; the very preacher of the Gospel will sometimes envy his fellow-preacher !"

"We know that human nature of itself is far short of perfection, dear Bessie ; but, believe me, you are wrong in thinking it so generally bad. I am convinced that it is possible, through God's

grace, to root from the heart all selfish bitterness and envy ; and I feel certain that there are many and many true Christians walking humbly among their fellow-men, seeking to do good merely for the sake of others, not alone for the reward of an eternal crown, or an exceeding weight of glory in the next world, but for the love of Christ, and through sympathy with their fellow-mortals on earth."

Miss Pilmer looked admiringly at the pure and enthusiastic expression of her friend's face as she spoke with energy, and in full confidence that she spoke truly.

" You are one of the rare exceptions to the dark rule that orders the world, my dearest Lizette," she said, taking her hand ; " but do not judge too well of mankind ; you will be sorely disappointed if you do. Oh, it is very, very bitter to find out that the people whom you may dearly love are among the common host of unworthy

beings ! That the people whom you still love, in spite of their faults, make you blush for them and their actions !”

Bessie’s eyes filled with tears as she spoke, and her lip trembled, but the emotion was only momentary ; after a short pause, she reverted to the subject of Sir James Bend.

“And so you do not like the excellent baronet ?” she said, pleasantly.

“No ; not at all.”

“But I cannot allow you to say that in my hearing.”

“Does it offend you ? Certainly he is a gentlemanly person in appearance and manners.”

“Oh, he is a perfect gentleman,” returned Bessie, energetically. “He is of a very high family, and has a large property ; his old ancestral home—Darktrees, in the north of England—is, I hear, a delightful place, quite romantic, and very ancient, with a moat and drawbridge, and

various remnants of feudal grandeur ; just what I like."

A new light dawned upon Lizette's mind as Bessie finished her sentence.

"You comprehend now, Lizette, what I wish to confide to you," she said, blushing slightly, and not looking straight at her companion. "I am engaged to be married to Sir James Bend."

Neither spoke again for some minutes.

"I hope, dear Bessie; that you may be happy," whispered Lizette, at last, clasping her friend's hand warmly. Miss Pilmer returned the pressure in silence.

"Thanks, my dearest Lizette," she said, after a little pause. "I think I shall be very happy—with no bar whatever to my utmost wishes. Sir James and I suit each other well ; and then, his rank and fortune are unexceptionable."

"And you really are attached to him ?" said

Lizette, hoping she might not be deemed impertinent.

“Oh, I am quite satisfied about the matter. You know of old, Lizette, that no person could ever force my inclinations or persuade me to act contrary to my own wishes. If I did not choose to accept Sir James Bend, no one in the world could compel me to do so,” and Bessie coloured proudly, with something of the old expression that used to illumine her face in childhood when she was wayward or self-willed.

“As to loving to distraction, and all that sort of ideal attachment, I do not pretend that I feel it. I certainly have my wits about me very rationally, but I would experience much pain and disappointment if anything prevented the match. Now do not look so gravely at me. You may, probably, love to distraction some of these days, and become a dutiful slave to your husband, but I always think it is safer for a woman not to

be too much in love. She can see clearer for her own advantage when she is not blinded by other powerful feelings ; and I assure you I intend to have my own way in all things, and I never will submit to tyranny or anything like that," said Bessie, in a determined tone.

Lizette did not think this speech savoured of deep love and confidence on the part of the affianced bride for her husband elect. The latter part of it sounded rather like a declaration of war to the knife unless the enemy yielded to all conditions.

"I hope you will always live on happy terms with your husband, Bessie. I should think marriage must be a very wretched state where there is not perfect union between the husband and wife."

"Oh, provided I can do as I please, I shall be most peaceful and amiable ; and even, perhaps, may occasionally sacrifice my own wishes for

the sake of my beloved James, if he is particularly good; but I assure you I am not one of those tame-spirited people who let themselves be trampled upon."

"You speak, dear Bessie, as if you were about to marry some dreadful tyrant."

"Oh, I dare say it is *I* who will be the greater tyrant of the two; but there is no knowing what men are. I hardly know a good man among my acquaintances, except one."

"Who is he? Your father?"

"No; I forgot papa; he is good enough, but I did not mean him. You must know the person."

"Unless you mean Sir James himself, I cannot imagine who this solitary good man may be."

"Sir James!" repeated Bessie, looking amused, as if she thought Lizette had said something very absurd. "No; I did not mean Sir James—

I wish my good fiancé had a prettier name—the person I mean is nearly good to perfection.”

“Do tell me his name, Bessie.”

“My own dear cousin, Dillon Crosbie.”

“He was always very kind.”

“Oh, he is too good! and brave and sensible—perfection, as I said before. You have heard, of course, how well he behaved when the transport was going out to Gibraltar?”

“No, I have not heard of it,” said Lizette.

“I wonder mamma never told Mrs. Meiklam of it,” resumed Bessie. “Colonel Selby, who commands the regiment, sent home a flattering account of his courage and presence of mind during a fearful storm which arose and threatened to destroy the vessel. I believe it struck on a rock, or something of that sort; and, in the midst of horrible confusion, Dillon went about exerting himself most bravely—encouraging those on

board. Indeed, Colonel Selby said only for him the troops would surely have gone to the bottom. It is only what I would expect from him. Do you know where he is now?"

"I cannot tell."

"In papa's room ; reading the newspaper for him from top to bottom."

"Is Mr. Pilmer ill?"

"Yes ; he fancies he never recovered the cold he caught travelling at night from Wedmington ; but mamma thinks he could get up if he liked ; and there is Dillon tormenting his brain with speeches a yard long, and debates of the most tiresome description. I was quite provoked with him because he refused to come down and practise an Italian duet with me. Do you know what Dillon said 'of you yesterday? but I must not tell."

Lizette's colour changed a little ; she was glad Bessie did not tell her what Dillon had said of her.

“Dillon is very poor,” said Bessie, picking a rose; “his father left him wretchedly off. I have no patience when I think of that selfish man spending all his money, and leaving his son with hardly a penny, you may say,” and she pulled the rose all to pieces in her indignation against the late Captain Crosbie. “Mamma told him yesterday he must look out for a wife with plenty of money, but he said he never would; that if he did not happen to fall in love with a rich woman, he would never marry one, as he had a great horror of people marrying through interested motives; and, perhaps, after all, he is right.”

“Perhaps!” repeated Lizette ardently. “Oh, Bessie, believe that he is quite right, there cannot be a doubt of it.”

Bessie remained silent for some minutes, still plucking at the remnant of her rose.

“And now, dear Bessie,” said Lizette, after a lengthened pause in their conversation, “I wish

to speak with you upon a subject that concerns myself. It is time that I thought of leaving Markham, and determined upon some plan for my own support. I am ready and willing to earn my bread, and the sooner I set about it the better ; I should like your advice, however."

All at once Miss Pilmer's face assumed an indignant, surprised expression.

"And do you really think that I—that any of us—would allow you to go out upon the world earning your own bread—you, the favourite of our dear friend, Mrs. Meiklam? No, my dear Lizette, while I have a home you shall not want one. Do not attempt to leave Markham unless you go to some better place."

"But I must learn to make myself useful and independent ; I could not think of intruding longer upon such kindness as I have met here."

"Kindness !" repeated Bessie, curling her lip ;
"I think it is your *right* to be here. Had Mrs.

Meiklam been spared such a sudden death she would surely have made a provision for you. Do not imagine for a moment that you are an intruder in my father's house."

"You are too good to me. Why should I become a burthen on Mrs. Meiklam's relations, merely because she was kind enough to take pity on me when I was a poor destitute child, with no one to claim protection from, and to rear me up and educate me for so many years? I am now able to push my way, in some degree, in the world."

"Silence, my little friend," said Bessie, gently putting her hand on her mouth, "you offend me by saying such things; you make me feel ashamed of myself—of my family."

Lizette held her peace; she felt that she dared not speak further on the subject of leaving Markham, for that day, at least.

"Do you remember how fond you were of

flowers long ago?" said Lizette, as they were leaving the garden.

"Yes ; but I hardly care about anything now ;" and, twitching off a leaf from a shrub at hand, Bessie opened the garden gate. Lizette could not help remarking how haughty the carriage of her friend's head was as she moved towards the house ; for, whenever Miss Pilmer was annoyed or disconcerted she looked very proud, and Lizette's allusion to quitting the shelter of her father's house had displeased her.

CHAPTER X.

AN UNEXPECTED SUMMONS.

THERE was a continued routine of gaiety going on at Markham House, insomuch that poor Lizette grew weary of it. Bessie wished her to join in all plans of amusement with much kindness, and she felt unwilling to refuse, even though Mrs. Pilmer treated her with a coldness which was only the more marked from its contrast to her cordiality and attention to rich or influential friends. Sir James Bend, of course, was a daily visitor at the house ; and certainly Lizette soon

came to the conclusion that there was no love lost between him and herself; if she disliked him, he decidedly returned the ill-feeling. More than once he asked Mrs. Pilmer if "that girl, Miss Stutzer," was about to make her house a home, and Mrs. Pilmer had replied, "Indeed I don't know what she intends; it is all Bessie's fault that I haven't hinted to her to leave Markham;" and then, of course, Mrs. Pilmer would naturally behave coldly to Miss Stutzer, not listening or replying to her observations, and very seldom addressing her. Lizette thought that when Bessie's wedding took place she would again endeavour to speak of leaving Markham and earning her bread.

Mr. Pilmer's cold did not seem to be getting better; he never came out of his room, and Lizette often heard him calling Dillon Crosbie in fretful tones, whenever his nephew was long absent from him. Indeed Dillon was to be seen

running lightly up and down stairs, perhaps humming an opera air, several times a day, going and coming on errands for his uncle, who, like a great many people of quiet demeanour when in health, was extremely exacting and peevish when ill ; and he fancied no one did anything so well for him as his nephew, who was called upon to drop the exact quantity of laudanum for sleeping draughts, or to mix up potions of nauseous flavour ; and Bessie was highly amused when she saw her cousin moving about her father's room, very carefully, setting things to rights, or dropping the aforesaid laudanum with as great precision as if the smallest drop over or under would endanger life ; and she laughed, and said he ought to apply for a situation in an hospital as he would make an invaluable nurse ; and, indeed, he made a far better one than Miss Bessie did, for she found it very hard to make herself at all useful in a sick room. She would spill papa's draughts in hand-

ing them to him ; and knock down chairs with her wide skirt ; and, in short, do more harm than good during her occasional dutiful moments of attendance. The chief thing she could do was to kiss papa and hope he was better, coax him to get up, playfully telling him he was quite well, and might come down stairs if he only chose, which always enraged the sick man very much, and he would inform her that she had no feeling, that nobody had any feeling except Dillon ; but this never vexed Bessie. One day as Lizette was on the lobby near Mr. Pilmer's room, Bessie beckoned to her from the door to come in. She obeyed, and found Mr. Pilmer half-sitting up in bed, looking very ill, indeed, quite sallow, with great lines and wrinkles seaming his face. His nephew was sitting at the head of the bed, with the *Times* in his hand. Lizette had scarcely seen the latter for some time lately, except at breakfast and dinner. Mr. Pilmer shook hands

kindly with Miss Stutzer, and asked her how she was ; he had often inquired for her latterly.

“ I want Dillon to ride with Sir James and me,” said Bessie, “ and I am sure you will read the paper for papa, Lizette.”

“ With great pleasure,” replied Lizette, putting her hand on the *Times*, which Dillon was holding carelessly. He relinquished the newspaper, but did not move from the chair.

“ Well, are you coming ?” asked Bessie.

“ I don’t think I am.”

“ Why ?”

“ I am greatly interested in politics now ; I want to hear all the debates and disputes in to-day’s paper.”

“ Then you had better read for yourself, and let Lizette come out with me,” replied Bessie.

“ No, I am tired of reading ; Miss Stutzer will finish the rest of the speeches,” and Dillon leaned back in his chair, with a fixed determination not

to leave it. Lizette sat down and prepared the *Times* for perusal, while Bessie, after sundry remonstrances, went away to ride out with her affianced husband.

“Well, who is going to read for me?” inquired Mr. Pilmer, a little impatiently.

“Miss Stutzer will be kind enough to read,” replied Dillon, smiling at Lizette.

She began to read a very long speech in which one noble lord abused several other noble lords, and “hon. members,” condemning various measures in strong terms; and, as her silvery gentle voice read on, Dillon’s eyes were often resting on her pensive face with a dreamy, musing expression. At length, having wended through some long harangues, interspersed here and there with “cheers,” “hear, hear,” and “laughter,” Lizette looked up and laughed herself. She caught Dillon’s earnest looks, which speedily

changed to a brighter one, and he laughed too.

“Is it not all very absurd?” he said.

“To me it is uninteresting,” replied Lizette, and she laid the paper down, with a graver look as she added, “would it not be well to ask Mr. Pilmer if we might read something else for him besides the newspaper.”

“You mean something more serious, perhaps,” said Dillon, looking into her soft eyes.

“Yes ; I wish he would let me read—the Bible,” observed Lizette, feeling afraid to ask the favour too abruptly.

“Well, what are you whispering about?” demanded Mr. Pilmer fretfully.

“Miss Stutzer wishes to know if you would not like to hear her read a chapter in the Bible,” replied Dillon frankly.

“The Bible? what is that for?” and Mr. Pilmer opened his dull light eyes widely for an

instant, with a look as if he were surprised or frightened. "Well, she may if she likes. Miss Stutzer, you may read."

Dillon got up to fetch the required book, and then Lizette read some portions of it that she considered suitable to the occasion, and to the comprehension of the invalid. Few and far between were the times that Mr. Pilmer had ever read the Bible for himself or anybody else ; and now, there was something strange and solemn, almost fearful, in the sacred words falling from the reader's lips. Something of greater weight than had ever seemed conveyed in them before. He listened attentively, all the time breathing heavily, and sighing once or twice. Dillon's eyes were fixed upon the reader nearly all the time, but she did not know it ; she was altogether absorbed in her subject, and she continued reading till some one knocked at the door.

"Come in," said Dillon.

“There’s a gentleman below wishes to see Miss Stutzer,” said a servant entering.

A gentleman? Who could it be? The colour rose to Lizette’s cheek, not unperceived by Dillon Crosbie, as she reluctantly laid the book down and repaired to the drawing-room.

CHAPTER XI.

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AN UNWELCOME VISITOR.

As she had half expected, she found the mysterious gentleman desirous of seeing her to be Mr. Tom Ryder, who had called upon her and the Pilmers. Very dandified indeed was Tom, and Mrs. Pilmer thought him quite a fine-looking young man, and so he was, if to be very large was to be fine looking. He was very *empresé* in his greeting of Miss Stutzer, and shook hands cordially, looking so tenderly into her blushing face that her eyes speedily sought the carpet. The shrewd

Mrs. Pilmer, who had keen knowledge of such matters, saw at once that young Ryder admired Lizette, and, quick as lightning, some thought entered her head as to the likelihood of his being induced to offer himself as a suitor; for though very often in London, he had never before visited at Markham, and his appearance there now, so soon after Miss Stutzer's arrival, and his having asked particularly for her, certainly looked rather suspicious. The lady had a pleased smile on her sharp face, for Tom was a lawyer, already in pretty good practice, and the probability of his proposing for Lizette and marrying, and thus relieving herself and Mr. Pilmer of the responsibility of thinking what was to become of her, was grateful enough to her. But would he be induced, even by the beauty that Mrs Pilmer acknowledged Lizette to possess, to marry a penniless girl? Ah, there was the stumbling block—a great one in Mrs. Pilmer's mercenary estimation. While Ryder

was speaking to Lizette, who felt much confusion in recollecting their last most unpleasant, almost disastrous, interview, the shrewd lady was making up some plans for her future and present behaviour.

“ I am so happy to see you, Mr. Ryder,” she said ; “ it is very long since I had that pleasure, and really you are grown so tall, so improved, that I could scarcely believe it was you at all when the servant announced you.”

“ You are not as much altered, then, as I could ever expected,” replied Tom, who was more blunt than polite, “ I don’t think you have a gray hair more than you had six or seven year ago !”

“ You flatter me,” said Mrs. Pilmer with a secret sneer.

“ Upon my soul I don’t ; it is a thing I never do, that ; I never flatter any one, and I hate to be flattered myself, too.”

“ Ha! ha! You are very amusing, really ; but surely you do not like rudeness ?”

“ It’s better than humbug, decidedly. Don’t you think so, Lizette ?”

Lizette smiled—she could not help it.

“ I think sincerity preferable to flattery ; but I also think people should be polite on all occasions.”

Tom looked at her, as she spoke, with a penetrating expression of eye, and then burst out laughing.

“ Politeness, in my opinion, is generally compounded of lies ; and if I do intend to fib now and then, I’ll know for what ; there’s no use sinning for trifles. If I was honest, upon my honour, I’d starve—that is, if I was dependent on the business—though happily I am not. The governor sees that I have a pretty smart allowance, so that I needn’t do more than I like in the fibbing line.”

“ Really, you make me laugh,” simpered Mrs. Pilmer.

“ Oh, laugh away, ma’am,” said Tom, who detested Mrs. Pilmer and her airs, which had accumulated in a most aggravating manner since her residence in London. “ I like to see people enjoying themselves, I’m never offended at people laughing at me.”

“ But I’m only laughing at your droll way of talking. How are your mother and sisters ?”

“ Hang me if I know ; they don’t write often, and when they do favour me with an epistle, there is never anything in it worth twopence. I’d as soon never hear from home. Do you know, Lizette, I never heard you were in London till my father accidentally mentioned it in his last letter, containing a remittance.”

How Lizette wished he could have remained in ignorance of her being in London.

“So Crosbie’s come home?” he said, after a very little pause.

“Yes; my nephew has arrived on leave, from Gibraltar,” replied Mrs. Pilmer, graciously.

“A nice young fellow he always was,” resumed Tom; “is he as good-looking as ever?”

“Just the same, almost as he was in boyhood,” replied Lizette, earnestly.

“And the army hasn’t spoiled him? Officers get so confoundedly conceited and upsetting.”

“Mr. Crosbie is not at all conceited,” said Lizette.

“So much the better. Do you stay long here?”

Lizette coloured, and felt embarrassed.

“Oh, she is to remain for some time here,” replied Mrs. Pilmer. “You know she and my daughter were great companions in childhood, and Miss Pilmer does not easily forget her friends.”

“What a little piece of tyranny and pride Bessie was in old times!” exclaimed Tom. “Is she still as overbearing as she used to be? Had she been a boy, I think she and I would have quarrelled desperately. I never could bear her. Ha! ha!”

“You did not understand her,” said Lizette.

“Oh, faith I did, though! She made no mystery of her contempt and dislike of myself. It was she began the ill-feeling, decidedly. However, I never fretted about it, I assure you.”

“That was fortunate,” said Mrs. Pilmer.

“Will you stay and dine with us to-day?”

“Eh?” said Tom, looking surprised, and thinking he had not heard aright.

“You will stay and join our circle at dinner this evening?”

“Thank you, I will be very happy,” replied Tom, glad to have received the invitation on Lizette’s account, and to be near her, but for no

other reason, as he rather hated the Pilmers. Tom had a great deal of pride of a certain kind, and much independence of spirit. His father was rich, and he himself had prospects of being far richer, so he was by no means awed by the grandeur and elegance of Markham House.

Dillon Crosbie and he met very cordially that evening. They had many reminiscences of old times to recall to each other's mind, and they laughed over sundry schoolboy pranks, carried on at "old Benson's," with much interest. Bessie was not displeased to see an old friend, or rather, enemy ; she shook hands heartily with Tom, and was very gracious, though she thought him, in her heart, a fearful savage, and wondered what on earth had put it into his head all at once to pay a visit at Markham ; for Bessie, in some respects, was very much less sharp-witted than her mother, and it never entered her head to think of connecting the visit of the large, rough, unrefined-look-

ing young man, with the presence at Markham House of her fair, spiritual-looking little friend, Lizette Stutzer. Sir James regarded Tom with curious eyes; but it did not in the least concern him what sort of people dined or were intimate at Mr. Pilmer's house. He was quite indifferent on the subject. No description of company to be met at Markham could at any time have altered his feelings or intentions towards the young lady to whom he was affianced. His intentions!

“He is the son of our Yaxley physician—our medical man, formerly,” said Mrs. Pilmer, in explanation of her attention to the strange young man, as she addressed the baronet; “and I always feel it my duty to patronize these sort of people. His family are most respectable—very much so, indeed—but, unless you wish it, I will not introduce him to you.”

“Oh, just do as you please,” the baronet replied, receiving Mrs. Pilmer's information with

an inane, careless expression of countenance, which betrayed no interest whatever in the matter. The lady, however, did *not* introduce Tom to Sir James, an omission that young Ryder never remarked, so that it gave him no concern whatever. He had not the slightest wish to make the acquaintance of any titled person except in the course of business: and he surveyed the present baronet with cool eyes, thinking, probably, that he was himself far the finer looking man of the two, and possessing a very hearty contempt for affectation and conceited airs.

“We will be glad to see you, Mr. Ryder, whenever you call here, which, I hope, may be often,” said Mrs. Pilmer, as she bade Tom good-night; “and you will always be welcome at our dinner table.”

Bessie stared wonderingly at her mother.

“Thank you very much,” replied Tom, really obliged, for once in his life, to “old mother

Pilmer ;” and he wrung her hand most warmly. Lizette received an unmistakable pressure of the hand in parting that night.

“ I dare say,” thought Tom, as he walked home, with the stars shining down upon him and all the great city round him, “ I dare say Lizette has confided to Bessie Pilmer our little love affair, and that makes Mrs. Pilmer invite me to the house. Sly little fairy, after all ! ”

CHAPTER XII.

A LETTER FROM YAXLEY.

THE post had just arrived; Mrs. Pilmer was reading a letter received from Mrs. Ryder, at Yaxley.

“MY DEAR MRS. PILMER, — Many thanks for your kind attention to my dear Tom, who writes of you all with gratitude and admiration. I have often reproached myself for not writing to make enquiries about you and dear Bessie, whom we all missed so greatly at Yaxley; and now I am glad

to take the opportunity of doing so, and of thanking you for your hospitality to Tom. The Doctor is always talking of you and Mr. Pilmer; and our dear Mrs. Meiklam, though dead in the flesh, still lives in our memories as vividly as ever. Sad, indeed, was her end! How cruel that anyone should have annoyed her in her old age; hurrying her to the tomb! My dear friend, it is a sad world; you know, of course, to what I allude. I suppose Miss Stutzer has left you long ago. I wish her well, in spite of her ingratitude and shameful conduct to Mrs. Meiklam; her light behaviour at Meiklam's Rest, in connexion with a young man, whom, for many reasons, I must not name, made me greatly fear she would find it difficult to get on in life as a respectable, serious-minded young woman. How thankful we should feel, my dear Mrs. Pilmer, that our own dear girls are all that we could wish! Poor Miss Stutzer! I pity, while I condemn her. She

was young, of course, but that cannot excuse her flirting about at all hours, in direct contradiction to Mrs. Meiklam's orders. I hope she will get steady, or else the consequences may be very grave. Give my love to dear Bessie, and say I long to hear from her, and believe me

“Your very sincere friend,

“EMILY RYDER.”

Mrs. Ryder piqued herself much upon her powers of letter-writing, and in great dread of her son Tom being thrown in the way of his dangerous little sweet-heart, she wrote to Mrs. Pilmer that epistle, hoping Lizette Stutzer might be sent away from Markham, and placed in safety elsewhere. Mrs. Ryder was not cruel; she only regarded herself as prudent; and, dear reader, bad as she may look here on paper, she was only very much like thousands and thousands of beings in the great round world, who pass for kind-

hearted, very nice women among their acquaintances. She was acting under great temptation; she wanted to save her son from what she thought a ruinous, ignoble connexion, and so she wrote *what she did not believe*. Oh, the vast number of lies told, and acted, and insinuated, in the every-day walk of many lives! We punish our little ones for glaring falsehoods; we slap Master Johnny if he breaks the window and denies the deed; we put little Polly in the corner, with her face to the wall, when she eats the jam and says she did not do so. Ah, if there was some one to chastise us grown-up folk when we told untruths! —some one to keep us in check before we entered sooner or later, the Court of the Eternal Judge, and stood quivering for what had been done that was unprincipled, and for what had been said that was false!

Mrs. Pilmer doubted the truth of Mrs. Ryder's assertions against Miss Stutzer; whatever the

young girl may have done that was objectionable in her short life, she did not think lightness of behaviour was at all likely to be among her faults. A flirt never confines her flirtation to one individual; she must always seize upon the man at present within reach. Therefore Lizette's conduct towards young Crosbie and Sir James Bend, and many other men at Markham, pointed out to the keen Mrs. Pilmer that she must have been misunderstood or belied at Yaxley. She did not accuse Mrs. Ryder of falsehood; she was sure she had reasons for what she had written to her, but Mrs. Pilmer knew she had received a letter from Mrs. Meiklam three days before her death, in which she wrote thus of Lizette, "My dear Lizette continues as dutiful, as affectionate, as ever; do not imagine that I am prejudiced or imaginative when I say that I believe most sincerely she is one of the purest-minded creatures on the earth." Yet Mrs. Pilmer was not ready to

write back to Mrs. Ryder, and quote these words in vindication of the slandered and forlorn girl; she had never even told of them to her husband or Bessie. Without telling palpable falsehoods, everyone might be misled; she could say what others said without revealing her own ideas on the subject of Miss Stutzer's conduct. Oh, Mrs. Pilmer and Mrs. Ryder, did you really believe there was a God, though you went to church every Sunday, and read aloud the responses of the liturgy, and even knelt at the altar to receive the sacrament?

Mrs. Pilmer debated a good deal in her own mind whether she would forward Tom Ryder's courtship of Miss Stutzer in defiance of his mother's expressed bad opinion of her, and so get rid of the girl altogether, or turn the orphan out of doors on the spot, as a person unworthy of further countenance. Either course might answer her own views, and as to the Ryders, she would

not care to have her acquaintance with them terminated at any time, or in any way. We care very little, generally speaking, for the opinions of those who are beneath us in wealth or rank; yet some revenge might be gratified by sending Miss Stutzer adrift—revenge for long years of uneasiness, envy, and hatred, experienced on her account.

“Read that letter,” she said, flinging Mrs. Ryder’s epistle over to Bessie, some hours after its arrival. “I think you will be rather surprised at its contents.”

Bessie read it wonderingly, flushing up, and then growing pale.

“Oh, what a dreadful woman!” she exclaimed, indignantly. “Even if such reports were spread by ignorance and malice, she never should have repeated them to us. I did not believe Mrs. Ryder could have been guilty of such unkindness.”

“You allow your enthusiasm to run away with your good sense, Bessie,” observed Mrs. Pilmer. “How can you or I possibly know how Miss Stutzer conducted herself as a grown-up girl at Yaxley? I have known hundreds of instances of good little children growing up into very bad, unsteady women.”

“And, surely, mamma, you do not think that poor Lizette is unsteady?” said Bessie, with trembling earnestness. “And she, who thinks so well of mankind, to be thus slandered! Oh, it is cruel! Let us put this letter into the fire.”

“Stay, Bessie,” remonstrated Mrs. Pilmer, eagerly possessing herself of Mrs. Ryder’s unhappy epistle; “you must let me answer it. I wish you were not so hasty and obstinate in your opinions. I must have my own way about that girl. I will not have any one in my house that has been so talked of. I thought young Ryder

admired and liked her, and I would have promoted her interests in every way ; but certainly not now. I give her up from this day."

"Mamma," said Bessie, her eyes shining with great tears, "you know I will soon leave you, never to be again in my childhood home as I have been for so many years, and you cannot deny me this request. You will not seek to part with Lizette till she is provided for? Tom Ryder will propose for her most certainly, and he will make her happy I am sure. Do not try to separate them ; it is a last request of mine, dear mamma, and you know you have rarely ever denied me anything."

Mrs. Pilmer had tears in her own eyes, too. She drew her child to her bosom—that dearly loved child—precious above all treasures, and mother and daughter wept sorrowfully—more sorrowfully, perhaps, than either would have dared to acknowledge to the other, or even to

herself. But, Mrs. Pilmer was still determined to have her own way. She would not annoy Bessie at present any further about the matter; her marriage would soon take place, and things might rest in a quiescent state till then. As soon as she was gone away, Lizette might go too.

Miss Pilmer thought it would be well if Ryder married Lizette—well to have her settled in the world, with some one to protect her. His mother might hate the match, of course, but mothers always objected to their sons' chosen wives; it was only a matter of natural everyday occurrence. Poor Lizette did not know that eyes were upon her, and speculations entered into respecting her future destiny, as Tom Ryder talked to her in evenings; neither had she an idea that he was seriously thinking of asking her to be his wife. She only knew his attentions were marked enough to be annoying; yet she was too gentle to repel

him by any incivility. She thought it would be best to allow him to talk to her without betraying any perplexity or dislike, and she hoped he might soon leave London; but the hope was vain. London was now to be his home, for he had left the parent roof at Yaxley to live in the great metropolis, and practise in his vocation there.

One evening, as he was sitting in the drawing-room, talking to her in low tones, while she was patiently doing some fancy-work at a little table, Bessie, who happened to be at a distant part of the room with Dillon Crosbie, touched the arm of the latter as she directed his attention to the very devoted manner of Mr. Ryder. Quickly enough Dillon's eye darted a look at the little worktable, and for a second or two it lingered there. An entirely new idea had been suggested to him by Bessie's observation, and as his glance fell upon Tom, he could not help suddenly thinking of the thrashing he had

given him eleven years ago at Benson's school. It was a curious association of ideas, this connexion of a courtship with a boxing match ; yet, in some strange way, it possessed Dillon's mind for a few moments ; then he looked upon the ground thoughtfully for a long while.

“What do you think of it?” asked Bessie, who was a good deal amused herself.

“I really cannot say.”

“Does not our little friend seem very contented and happy at her work there, with that pretty pensive expression of face? How very sweet she looks.”

Again Dillon's eyes sought the little worktable, and he observed that Miss Stutzer certainly did look extremely composed, sorting her worsteds, and occasionally raising her soft eyes, as she answered some observation of her admirer.

“She evidently likes him,” said Bessie, who felt quite satisfied and pleased, “for I am con-

vinced she would not encourage him if she did not; she is the last person that would. Her ideas agree with your own respecting *marriages de convenance*. She certainly is a sweet girl, and I sincerely hope this Tom will make her a good husband, as I am sure poor little Lizette would never know how to manage a bad one. She would just let him have his own way, and be a most unresisting slave, if he were a perfect Bluebeard."

Dillon made no answer to all this. Was he thinking of how well off Miss Stutzer would be if she married Tom Ryder, who report said was in a fair way of having soon a thousand a year? Was he thinking how fortunate she was to have captivated him, and, more than all, how fortunate he was in having captivated her?

When he went up to see his uncle that night, he did a great deal of mischief. He let a wine-glass slip out of his hand, and broke the lauda-

num bottle ; he poured out hartshorn instead of the usual cough draught, never finding out the mistake till his uncle refused to drink it, asking him what on earth he was about and if he had lost his eyesight?

CHAPTER XIII.

THE DIMMING SIGHT.

THE August twilight was deepening in the sick-room ; the house was very quiet.

“ Are you here, Dillon ? ” asked Mr. Pilmer, awaking from a short sleep.

“ Yes,” replied Dillon coming into view of his uncle.

“ Where are all the rest ? ”

“ They have not returned from driving out yet ; they will soon be at home.”

A sigh and a little pause, broken at length.

“Dillon, are you satisfied at the way you have been treated for twenty years under my care?”

“Yes, uncle, perfectly satisfied. You have been most kind.”

“Oh, I fear not. I fear there have been omissions—neglect—much to complain of. When I meet your mother, my dear Agnes, what shall I say to her of my guardianship of her boy? I have just been dreaming of her. She stood before me clearly, and I shrank from her gaze when I thought that you had not received the same treatment that would have been given a son of my own. No, Dillon; do not say I was kind to you. I have been harsh, unfeeling—oh, very bad indeed. I shouldn’t have sent you to Germany for so many years, and never allowed you to come home at vacation time. It was wrong, wrong, and I am sorry for it.”

“Nay, my dear uncle, I consider that you

have acted as a father to me in every respect ; far better than many fathers would have acted ; my gratitude to you is unbounded."

"Thank you, my dear boy, but my own conscience condemns me. Where is Bessie?"

"Still out, I think. She and Sir James were riding, I believe."

"And nothing will prevent that match—oh, nothing, I suppose? I wish, Dillon, I had never come to live in London ; I wish we had never known Sir James Bend."

"My dear sir, Sir James is a very sensible man," said Dillon, fearing Mr. Pilmer was beginning to rave.

"Sensible, do you say? I believe not. Dillon, I have lived all my life, as it were, in a trance ; I never could rouse myself up, and go energetically about anything. I was seldom firm in opposition to wrong or cruelty ; I seemed to go through the world with my eyes shut ; but I see pretty

clearly now—now, when I am going away for ever from those I have wronged and ill-treated. And so Bend is out riding with Bessie? Oh, God! I wish I had been firmer about that. The marriage settlements are drawn up already—you know I signed them a day or two ago; but something might happen yet to put it all off. How very dark it grows, Dillon! Are you there still? Give me your hand. I havn't made any will yet; but to morrow, perhaps, that may be done. Whose step is that outside?"

"It is Miss Stutzer."

"Call her in."

The young girl entered at once. She and Dillon had met very often of late in the sick-room, where she was called upon to read and give her assistance, for Mr. Pilmer had grown fond of her, and he meant to leave her the five hundred pounds suggested to him by Doctor Ryder; perhaps, he would make it over to her at once. To

escape from the unwelcome attentions of Tom Ryder, Lizette was glad to remain upstairs attending the invalid, while she was also gratified to find her serious reading and conversations listened to calmly and hopefully. No one in the house knew so well as herself how to be useful in the sick-room; no one knew how solemn the time was so well as she did. She was familiar with the approach of the dread messenger since she was a child; he had come suddenly; he had come stealthily; he had come in many forms and under many guises before her eyes for the last ten years of her life. Young as she was she had already stood patiently beside many death-beds at Yaxley. Without fear, without loathing, she had closed many a peasant's eyes in the last long sleep; those delicate fingers had never shrunk from the duty. Although by nature timid, this young and tender girl had nerved herself to meet many an arduous task bravely, yet she had not

courage to tell Bessie openly and candidly that her father would never more take his place in the family circle below stairs; never more leave the chamber where each coming dawn and twilight, each sunlit morn and darkening night, found him always weaker and weaker—failing in strength of mind as well as of body, yet gifted with occasional flashes of bright intellect, the last flashes before extinction. She dared not inform the unthinking daughter of the dread time coming, and her heart smote her for the cowardice. She felt that she was culpable.

“Good evening, Miss Stutzer,” said Mr. Pilmer, as she drew near the bed; “you are there, I suppose, though it is so dark I cannot see you. Could the window-curtains not be drawn aside, Dillon.

The curtains were drawn as desired; the faint evening light stole in, revealing everything dis-

tinctly in a subdued way, but Mr. Pilmer's eyes saw no clearer.

“I think of making my will to-morrow,” he said, “and I hope everything will be arranged satisfactorily ; you and your aunt, Dillon, will be my executors. Miss Stutzer, I will not forget you ; and, if I am spared longer than I expect I will make over five hundred pounds to you at once ; I should have done it before ; I have money enough ; I think I'll make it eight hundred or a thousand ; yes, I ought to do it—my own daughters will have twenty times that much.”

And Mr. Pilmer seemed as though speaking to himself, muttering his thoughts aloud. “Does Bessie intend to ride all night ? It must be near nine o'clock. Oh, I wish Bend was away in his own home ; anywhere but in mine. Miss Stutzer, are you here ? Well, I want to ask a favour of you ; when Bessie marries—*if* she marries that

man, don't desert her ; don't lose sight of them. Light the candles, Dillon ; I cannot bear this pitch darkness."

Dillon and Lizette exchanged looks of anxiety. Some one was heard running up stairs.

"Hah, that is Bessie come back at last ; call her, Dillon, and light candles when I desire you," said the sick man, starting, as he heard the steps without.

Bessie did not wait to be summoned, she entered in her hat and habit, looking very lovely. Lizette trembled and turned pale from sympathy.

"My dear Bessie—my beloved child," said Mr. Pilmer, as his daughter bent over him, the plume of her hat almost touching his forehead, "I cannot see you, for they won't light the candles, and the hour near ten, perhaps midnight, for what I know."

"Dear papa, it is only seven," said Bessie.

“Seven ! Ah, you rogue, you jest. In August it does not grow pitchy dark at seven.”

Rising slowly from her stooping posture, Bessie looked fixedly at Dillon and Lizette. Her eye bore an inquiring, scrutinizing expression, that the latter shrunk from.

“Will you light candles when I ask you?” called out Mr. Pilmer, impatiently.

Dillon rang the bell.

“What does he mean ?” asked Bessie, sitting down as if weary or overpowered.

No one replied to her.

“Bring candles, and tell Mrs. Pilmer to come up,” said Dillon to the servant, who now entered.

Lights appeared ; the room was filled with brightness.

“So you won’t have candles ? Didn’t you order them, Dillon ?” said Mr. Pilmer.

“Is he blind ?” whispered Bessie, clasping Lizette’s hand tightly.

Mrs. Pilmer ran up as soon as summoned. She was in a measure always prepared for the worst; the attending physician had informed her long before that her husband's illness might terminate fatally, but she was not quite sure of that; she never placed implicit faith in doctors' prophecies.

"You are all here now?" said the sick man, whose ears were still acute of hearing. "I cannot see you; I think I never will see you again. Bessie, my child, draw near to me; let me hold your hand. Is it too late to speak now—could you break off that marriage?" he asked in a faint tone. "*Don't marry James Bend.*"

"He wanders," said Mrs. Pilmer, looking alarmed.

But he wandered no more that evening, nor uttered sound of mortal speech again; the head fell farther back, the dim eyes closed as if in sleep, and he slept the sleep of death.

“Oh, my God, why was I not prepared for this!” exclaimed Bessie, wildly, when the fearful truth became known to her, and then she fell senseless into Dillon Crosbie’s arms.

CHAPTER XIV.

MRS. PILMER HAS A PRIVATE INTERVIEW WITH
MR. RYDER.

It was a solemn time at Markham. Stiffened and chill the corpse lay, with the September sun shining on it through the open window. Dillon Crosbie felt his uncle's death a great blow; he had always treated him as kindly as it was possible for him to treat any one, and the young man had not met with much kindness in the course of his life. It was he who managed the funeral, and all was done quietly and well. Mrs.

.

Pilmer, in the excess of her grief and gratitude to her nephew for his assistance in this trying time, made a promise of continuing to him the annual allowance which her husband had given him of late years, but she did not think of befriending Lizette Stutzer; that was another affair, and the law could not compel her to do so, for Mr. Pilmer left no will. Fate seemed very hard upon poor Lizette.

Bessie suffered bitterly from remorse and sorrow of all kinds. She had no consolation to cling to, no inward spiritual comfort to support her. She was truly sorrowing as one without hope. Her grief was, perhaps, too intense to last long. Sir James Bend came every day, but he could not see his betrothed. She refused to see anyone; even her mother was scarcely permitted to break upon her solitude. Bessie felt that she had not been a sufficiently devoted daughter. She mourned over her carelessness

during her father's illness, and the many times she had disregarded his wishes, even on trifling occasions, stood up in array of fierce battle against her. Every such remembrance seemed written on her heart in characters of blood; and, now, his last words, spoken to herself, bearing such a strange admonition, perplexed her much. Was he raving? Was he perfectly collected when he uttered that final sentence? There was a wretched conflict going on in her mind. Very long this despairing grief lasted, but it died out by degrees. The nightly weepings ceased; the moans of anguish subsided; and she was at length able to make her appearance down stairs. Pale and delicate she looked, but always beautiful. Sir James met her gladly; for, from the dismal accounts given to him by Mrs. Pilmer, he had begun to fear she might have sunk under this inordinate grief, and it would not do for her to die just at present he thought; so she was

welcomed with a feeling of sincere pleasure on her return to the drawing-room, habited in sable garments of mournful aspect. Much to Bend's annoyance, however, the young lady very steadily refused to marry while the mourning for her father lasted. No persuasions or remonstrances could in the least move her. In vain friends told her that in such a case as hers, with the preliminaries all arranged, &c., it was a common thing to marry quietly a month or two after the loss of a dear relative. She refused to abide by any counsel that opposed her own inclinations. There was almost a superstitious feeling connected with this steady determination to delay the marriage.

Tom Ryder's visits at Markham commenced again after things there had resumed their usual course, and Mrs. Pilmer determined she would do her duty towards him and herself. She would not deceive him with respect to Miss Stutzer's character. Before matters came to a crisis,

she sought an interview with the young man alone.

“My dear Mr. Ryder,” she said, looking pensive and grieved in her weeds, “will you let me speak a few words with you in all confidence and friendship?”

“Oh, with pleasure,” replied Tom, looking a little surprised. He supposed she was not going to tell him Bessie had fallen in love with him.

“I have observed your attentions to Miss Stutzer, and I believe you to be an honourable man. I always looked upon them as meant seriously, and until lately I felt happy in thinking the young lady—girl—ahem—was likely to be settled advantageously.”

Tom coloured, and then turned pale; he felt really nervous.

“My opinions have now changed respecting this matter, and I hope to see the end of it.”

Poor Tom caught the back of a chair for support. Was he going to be expelled the house?

"I am sorry, very sorry, Mrs. Pilmer," he stammered faintly.

"Do not regret it, Mr. Ryder," continued the lady gravely. "You will learn yet to thank me for my frankness. Reports concerning Miss Stutzer's conduct at Yaxley have induced me to speak thus openly to you."

Tom fixed his eyes steadfastly on Mrs. Pilmer's face—steadfastly, and wonderingly.

"Her youth, of course, may excuse her," she continued; "and I should be sorry to see her thrown altogether upon the world; yet I should be far more sorry to see her married to any honourable young man of my acquaintance. Oh, it would be very imprudent to think of such a thing! We always look to the wife to purify and exalt the husband, and when this cannot be hoped for, the marriage must be disastrous."

“What the deuce reports do you allude to?” said Tom, rather fiercely, and paying no attention to Mrs. Pilmer’s romantic view of a wife’s purifying attributes.

“Do not excite yourself, my dear sir. I am very, very sorry to be obliged to broach this unhappy subject to you; but it is my duty. The girl is unworthy of you, and I tell you so.”

“She must be very bad indeed if she is less worthy than myself,” thought Tom, who rather distrusted that sharp-eyed lady’s hints and warnings.

“Will you tell me plainly, Mrs. Pilmer, what the devil you are at?” he demanded at last.

A faint colour rose to the lady’s sallow cheek; her eye flashed; but she maintained her usual self-possession. She felt glad to be able to humble that impertinent young man.

“If you doubt me I can give you sufficient

proof, and certainly sufficient authority for my words," she said in a dignified tone.

"Then, for God's sake, do it at once," said Tom, feeling as if on the rack.

Mrs. Pilmer smiled bitterly, and was about to draw from her pocket Mrs. Ryder's letter, when the door opened, and Bessie entered. Her hand was stayed then, and, not wishing to discuss the matter any further in her daughter's presence, she left the room. Tom took an early opportunity of withdrawing from the house also, and he got no invitation to dinner that day, nor for many days again at Markham.

Meanwhile Dillon Crosbie's leave of absence was drawing to a close. He had now a very short time to remain in England. His regiment was ordered to the West Indies.

CHAPTER XV.

L'AMOUR TENDRE.

It was pretty far advanced in the autumn. Bessie and her cousin Dillon were walking in the garden arm-in-arm. The twilight fell gently on late roses and fading plants.

“This parting coming so soon after our late affliction makes me very sad,” she said, sighing. “Oh, what a dark world it is, Dillon! How fearful to be endowed with powers of feeling, and then to be so sorely tried! Surely, women bear a very suffering part in this lower world?”

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so—sending you out to brave mosquitoes and yellow fever in the West Indies.”

“A soldier must not mind those things ; he must learn to resign himself to every call of duty, and how to bear separation and knocking about at a moment’s notice.”

“You seemed to have learned how to bear everything disagreeable long before you were a soldier,” said Bessie.

“There are some things hard enough to bear,” observed Dillon, who was looking on the ground.

“Ah, my philosopher, so you have found that out !” cried Bessie, triumphantly.

“I never said that I had no feeling—did I?”

“Sometimes you acted as if you had not much,” said Bessie, not altogether in jest ; “but I should not like to see you grow desponding ; I would then fancy that the sky was about to fall.”

“I hope I shall never utterly despond,” said Dillon.

“Then why did you say some things were hard to bear?”

“That was not saying I would not bear them,” replied the young man.

A serious light now replaced the merry one that had lately shone in Bessie's eyes.

“If there is anything that I can do for you, Dillon, never hesitate to ask me,” she said, warmly. “I may have it in my power to do a great deal. Sir James Bend has much interest in influential quarters, and he must exert it for you. Oh, Dillon, you must never conceal any difficulty that you may be in from me!”

Dillon pressed her hand in silence, turning his eyes on her face with a look that thanked her more than words could have done. But he was not thinking then of interest in high places, or of pecuniary assistance, or anything of that sort. His despondency proceeded from a very different source.

“I wish Tom Ryder would propose for Lizette,” said Bessie, whose thoughts were prone to wander quickly from one subject to another. Perhaps, too, there was something mesmeric in the influence that obliged her to speak upon this topic.

“Do you think Miss Stutzer likes Tom?”

“Oh, decidedly she does; it seems a curious taste, too; but I am glad she likes him, though I do not wish to speak directly on the subject to her yet; for I know she is just the timid, foolish little goose that would grow embarrassed in his company if she thought eyes were upon her. Tom has not been here for a week now. I dare say he is summoning up courage to propose when he next makes his appearance at Markham.”

“Perhaps so.”

“I shall be glad to see Lizette settled before I go from home myself. It will be a great weight off my mind. But who would ever dream of her

fancying such a queer creature? And yet I believe they have been attached for years—quite a boy and girl love, ripened to maturity. Heigh-ho! Well, they are fortunate not to have dreamed their young dream in vain. Luke Bagly, the old steward of Mrs. Meiklam, met Foster somewhere near Covent-garden lately, and he told him sly Miss Lizette was carrying on a flirtation with Mr. Ryder long ago; so, perhaps the affair is all settled between them. Ah, you naughty boy, you have plucked my only remaining dahlia!”

“Pardon; I was not thinking of what I did,” said Dillon, scattering the deep red leaves of the flower upon the garden walk.

“And now to make matters worse, you are spoiling the tidy aspect of the walk. If you must have a flower let me give you this rose;” and she plucked a rare and beautiful rose, full-blown, yet perfectly close and fragrant.

“It is *la rose de Dijon*,” she said in answer to

his admiring observations. "There, preserve it for my sake as long as you can, and I will get you a sprig of *L'amour tendre* from the conservatory as we pass, to keep with it."

"Thank you," replied her cousin ; and Bessie almost smiled at the unconscious expression of his face as he took the rose. She was one of those people who can feel amused even while suffering great bitterness at heart. She knew Dillon was not thinking of either her or her offerings.

"Dear coz, what are you so sober for ? I must not let you fall into low spirits," she said, a little anxiously. "I am afraid you do not like going to this stupid Barbadoes. How I wish you were going to some other more pleasant quarter."

"I assure you I like going to Barbadoes as well as any place else ; I don't much care where I go !" and Crosbie sighed somewhat heavily.

"Why do you sigh, Dillon ? Do not deem me

impertinent, but I wish for your confidence, and surely I am entitled to it. Did ever sister love brother as well as I have loved you?" she asked in a voice that trembled nervously.

"Some time else, not now, I may tell you, Bessie, why I sighed; some time when your laughing eye is far out of reach," and he smiled curiously.

"Tell it here in the twilight, Dillon," she said, almost imploringly. "Do not let us part with any secret unrevealed—any mystery that weighs upon your soul."

"Nay, Bessie, it is of no consequence—I am ashamed of myself. Let us go in."

"I dare say he is getting tired of the army," thought Bessie, as they went slowly towards the house.

She did not forget the promised sprig from the conservatory, and, entering it, as they passed, she plucked it and gave it to him.

“What name did you say this was called?” he asked, taking it from her hand.

“Oh, never mind the name of it,” she replied, smiling to herself. “It does not signify ; but you may preserve it, and think of me when you look at it.”

Dillon was to leave Markham much about that hour next evening.

CHAPTER XVI.

HOPELESS.

THE life of a soldier is, indeed, a varied, chequered one, wherein the greetings of to-day become so quickly exchanged for the farewells of to-morrow—the meeting of one glad moment so dearly paid for by the parting of another. That last day of Crosbie's stay at Markham was a busy one—the last of the packing up, and the hurry of approaching departure had arrived. Bessie Pilmer had laughed and talked much all that day, endeavour-

ing to clear away the cloud that rested very palpably on her cousin's brow ; and he had laughed too, but the mirth of neither was from the heart.

The daylight was growing rather shadowy when Dillon entered the drawing-room, where Lizette Stutzer was sitting alone. She had been reading and her book now rested listlessly on her lap.

“Do not let me disturb you,” he said, putting down a portfolio which he had brought into the room.

“Oh, I am not doing anything,” replied Lizette, now laying her book on the table.

“What have you been reading?” he asked, taking up the little volume.

“A book Mrs. Meiklam gave me, ‘*The Church in the Army*,’” replied Lizette.

“Did Mrs. Meiklam think you were likely to be connected with the army?” asked Dillon, while one of his old, bright, amused looks, came into

his eye. "She thought, probably, you might become a soldier's wife."

"Oh, no ; she gave me a great many books of all kinds."

The faintest shade of pink now stole over Lizette's whole face, vanishing soon again. Dillon looked through the *Church in the Army*, but laid it quickly down. There was a little time of silence. Lizette's eyes were fixed upon the floor. When she raised them, they met an earnest, thoughtful gaze from those of her companion. Her heart was beating faster than usual. Dillon was almost upon the point of speaking ; but no, he must not utter the words that had risen to his lips. He was glad when Bessie hurriedly entered, bringing him a pair of slippers she had been working for him for a long time, and which were only just finished five minutes ago. She gave a very quick look at Lizette and him, but she had no time for observations, as Sir James was wait-

ing for an interview below. Dillon and Lizette were alone again.

“You were fond of pictures long ago,” he observed, coming near to her with the portfolio, “and perhaps you might value some of these; there are a good many views of scenery in Germany.”

“Oh, yes, I would like them so much!” she exclaimed, rising and looking with interest at each sketch shown to her. They were very masterly drawings, bold, and well-proportioned, and all bearing the impress of a finished hand. There were pictures of frowning ruins, crowning steep rocks — fair views of quiet, picturesque villages — scenes from Switzerland and Italy — all drawn from nature; and there stood a view of Gibraltar, with its endless batteries and tiers of guns pointing from the huge rock, rising so massive, and stern, and perpendicular above the water beneath. Lizette was delighted with

them ; and, while she gazed, she found herself thinking how a certain person was so kind, so brave, so clever, and accomplished—able to be calm in the midst of shipwreck and danger—able to soothe the sick—able to sing Italian duets and German solos and French *chansons*—able to draw with a master hand, and make himself useful and agreeable upon all occasions. Her companion did not know that all these thoughts were in her head, as she uttered little exclamations of pleasure at the drawings and said she would preserve them as things well worthy of being prized.

“They will do as well to keep as the lions and tigers of old,” said Dillon, smiling.

“And yet I would not give away those old lions and tigers for anything,” said Lizette, ardently, “I prize them as much as I do any memorial of the past !”

Why did you not speak now, Dillon Crosbie?

Why was your tongue tied? Was not this a good opportunity of saying out what you wanted to say? It was; but it slipped away, and the two people, who did not know what each other was thinking of, bent over the pictures, and made remarks upon them, and smiled quite calmly; for there was nothing for it but to be very calm indeed. And so the twilight darkened, and the dinner hour arrived. It had been arranged that Dillon was to go down to Southampton late that evening, as he was to embark from thence early next day. Still, all through the evening Bessie maintained her high spirits, talking with animation. Sir James Bend was glad to see her so cheerful, for Bessie was never vulgar, let her spirits be ever so high. Her mother might be vulgar; her father might have wanted *ton*; her general connections might not be so aristocratic as was desirable; but she was herself one of nature's own favoured

children, with a noble stamp upon her form that made all movements graceful.

And now it was time to say good-bye. Dillon had been running up and down stairs very often with a light step; for he had been forgetful now and then, as if he did not know well what he was about, and obliged to make two or three expeditions for each different thing required from his room before finding what he wanted; but all was ready now. It was time to say good-bye. If the ceremony of leave-taking were done away with we think friends would be able to bear separations better than they bear them under the present system of things. Had Dillon Crosbie got up and abruptly left the room without saying a word of adieu to any one, there would not have been anything half so affecting in his departure as there turned out to be on the part of some of the company when he commenced making his adieux according to prescribed rules. Mrs. Pilmer

parted from him very kindly, for he had been useful to her in many ways of late, in the arrangement of her affairs. Bessie was much overcome at the last moment, and flung herself into his arms with a wild burst of grief that suddenly broke all bounds; her mother was concerned, Sir James a little surprised—but he took all things coolly. As she was weeping and sobbing violently, he approached her and drew her away, while Dillon continued his adieux. Lizette was the last person to say good-bye to. She could not fling herself into his arms as Bessie had done, nor weep bitter tears; nor could he embrace her as he had embraced his cousin—though she likewise had been a friend of childhood—for there were rules of society to be observed, and, perhaps it was as well there were. So they shook hands as if they had been very indifferent acquaintances, and Lizette's fairy fingers only received the slightest pressure in the world.

“ And thus they parted, as those part
Who must indifferent seem,
While rushing o’er each silent heart
Came a noiseless, bitter stream
Of anguish never utter’d.”

He is gone at last. Away out in the dim November night, hurrying in a cab through London towards the Waterloo railway station, the street lamps flashing out upon the darkness—a dense atmosphere, and a dense weight upon the young soldier’s heart, though never did braver heart beat in soldier’s bosom than his. And now, arrived at the railway station, standing on the platform, with crowds hurrying to and fro—crowds of people who, perhaps, have just bade farewells to weeping friends at home, though there are many hard faces there that do not look as if tears often bedewed them. Yet, who could tell? Does any one think that the striking-looking young man, in the military cap and cloak, with the pale, handsome face and steady eye, that seems unlikely

to quail before anything, is very sorrowful in his inmost soul, as he goes calmly about getting his luggage stowed away properly, and doing all things with the business-like air of one accustomed to travelling? No—no one knows it. And now thundering away in the long train to Southampton—farther and farther from London each instant—farther and farther on his way to far off scenes. He is alone in the carriage; the little lamp shines above him; but he does not read; he leans back against the cushions, and buries his face in his hands.

Oh, the despair of those moments of utter, hopeless misery! How many of us that have passed our twentieth year can say that we have never known such moments? They are a heritage, almost universal, since the world began—part of the heritage of sin and its belongings.

CHAPTER XVII.

WAITING.

FOR a whole week Tom Ryder had been obliged to remain away from Markham, sorely against his will; law business had called him from London to a provincial town, but, as soon as possible, he returned to the city, and called at the Pilmers. He was determined to hear the worst from Mrs. Pilmer—to try his fate at last—to put himself out of pain, in short. It was necessary to ask the old lady for a downright explanation of her mysterious words respecting Miss Stutzer's

character; and he must be quick about it, too, for there was a rumour that the Pilmers were going from town. Bessie had got into low spirits, and declared she would pass the winter in Italy. Nothing would induce her to remain in England in all the dreary months of rain, and snow, and storm that were approaching. Mrs. Pilmer had worked herself up to a pitch of stern dutifulness quite remarkable. She was prepared to tell Mr. Ryder everything—that is, everything she *chose* to tell—concerning Miss Stutzer. Had she not his own mother's letter in “black and white” to show to him? If he did not believe her words, then indeed, she could not help him, nor could Mrs. Ryder blame *her*. After all, she thought it would be better to take the part of the Ryders at Yaxley—respectable people like them—than seek to befriend Lizette, even for her own convenience.

“I want to know, Mrs. Pilmer,” said Tom,

earnestly, "what you meant a fortnight ago by telling me Miss Stutzer was under a cloud at Yaxley—that there were unpleasant rumours about her?"

"I honour you for being straightforward, Mr. Ryder," replied the lady with calm dignity, "and I respect your perseverance in endeavouring to understand the truth about this girl. The more I see of you, the more sorry I should feel at your being drawn into any unfortunate engagement."

"Oh, the devil a bit you need fret about my being drawn into anything," said Tom. "I'm no fool, Mrs. Pilmer: I can see through all kinds of shams and humbugs. For God's sake, speak plainly, and end this cursed—I beg your pardon—this confounded beating about the bush."

"It is with reluctance I comply with your request, Mr. Ryder. Here, read this!"—and the young man was handed his own mother's elegant epistle, slandering the girl he loved.

Indignation and rage possessed him as he read it; neither respect for his mother nor for the lady in whose presence he stood, kept him from crushing the unfortunate letter in his large hand fiercely, with an oath terrible to hear.

“I know the person alluded to in this letter, Mrs. Pilmer,” he said, still white with fury. “I can refute every accusation brought against Miss Stutzer. The young man whom my mother mentions in this mysterious manner, as having caused so much sorrow to Mrs. Meiklam on Miss Stutzer’s account must have been — myself!”

It was Mrs. Pilmer’s turn to grow pale now. She was nearly upset from her pedestal of self-possession—she tottered, but did not fall.

“*You*, Mr. Ryder?” she asked in surprise.

“Yes, Mrs. Pilmer, myself; and what’s more, I’m certain my mother knew it, and knew also that what she wrote to you was as false as ——”

he did not finish the sentence, being at a loss for a comparison that would be polite.

“She wrote the letter; that is all I know of the matter,” said Mrs. Pilmer, growing sharp now. “I never like interfering in other people’s business. I have told you what I heard, and have so far fulfilled my duty to myself; you can pursue what course you like, and I wish you a very good morning,”

“Where is Miss Stutzer?” demanded Tom.

“I am not aware; ring the bell and the servants, perhaps, will tell you. I am now going to drive—so excuse my leaving you.”

Mrs. Pilmer then disappeared from the room and after a few minutes’ pause of deep thought Ryder stretched forth his hand and rang the bell.

“Will you tell Miss Stutzer that I wish to see her?” he said to the servant, who soon appeared.

“Yes, sir;” and Foster smiled as he left the door, but it was no smiling matter to Tom. His heart had almost ceased to beat; he was pale and nervous as a school girl, or a criminal at the bar of justice. Oh, powerful emotion that could make that strong frame tremble thus! The little French clock on the mantelpiece ticked the minutes out as they went by, in measured time; he walked to the window—he looked out—he opened the books on the table, without knowing what he did. In an hour all this suspense would be over—yes, in an hour. But how? In an hour would he be the happiest man in the world, or the most miserable? In an hour, would his hopes—the hopes of years—be fulfilled, or annihilated for ever.

There was something irritating in the eternal ticking of the French clock—something irritating in the feeble rays of the wintry sun shining through the large windows, falling on the

gorgeous furniture of the apartment. Would she never come?

The rustling of a dress—a light step sounding without—the handle of the door-latch turning slowly. It was indeed she—so long expected, yet so much dreaded.

Lizette Stutzer entered at last.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ANGUISH UNKNOWN.

SHE went towards Tom at once, for he felt unequal to meeting her even half-way; she wondered at his pallor—his agitated appearance. The touch of her soft hand thrilled him now in this moment of uncertainty and anxious doubt.

“You have not been here for a long time,” said Lizette kindly; “I hope you are quite well.”

“Oh, quite well,” replied Tom; and there was a pause.

“I hope your friends at Yaxley are all well,” continued Lizette.

“I don’t know indeed—I suppose they are.”

In vain Tom endeavoured to recollect all the love passages and proposals made in the novels he had read. Everything had flown out of his mind except the consciousness of his being most stupid and sheepish—a regular donkey.

“They’re going to Italy—the Pilmers?” he said abruptly.

“Yes, very soon; they have commenced packing up already.”

Another pause.

“Confound me if I know what to say!” thought Tom, despairingly. There was no use trying to glide gracefully into this frightful proposal, as heroes of romance always contrive to do. Their wits must be less easily put to flight than Tom’s were.

“I have come here this evening—no, this

morning—afternoon, Lizette, to tell you something of importance to you—I mean to myself—to say that my life depends on your answer—my happiness rests in your words. I shall be most miserable if you say no—ready to do anything or go anywhere. Oh, Lizette, do not drive me to distraction—do not reject me. You know how you have loved me—I mean how I have loved you—for so many days—pah! years. Oh God, Lizette, say you will marry me, and save me from despair!”

And that was Tom’s proposal—word for word correct—and, considering the incoherence of many like addresses, we think it rather a clever one—quite beyond the common. *

“Tom,” said Lizette, taking his hand gently, “I am sorry you ever thought of me in this light very, very sorry—we are not suited to each other in the least, and you know very well I don’t love you, though we may be friends always.

You must forgive me and forget me, but I never could be your wife."

Was that her answer really, or only some words in a frightful dream?

"Oh I am very sorry for you!" she exclaimed, seeing how deep was the anguish she had caused—an anguish that she comprehended better than she might have done some months ago—owing to new feelings that had lately sprung up in her own heart. "I always thought you knew that we never could be more to each other than friends, and now I am grieved indeed."

As in a trance, Tom knew that she was weeping, her tears falling heavily; but what good would they do him? They must part. His long-cherished dream was over for ever.

Patiently he bore it all. He was sorely stricken, but dumb. She followed him to the door—ay, out to the stairs and hall—and when he gave her his hand at parting, she took it in both her own,

uttering a warm "God bless you, Tom, and forget me."

The servants never knew when he left the house that day; but they knew he never entered it again—never again. But he did nothing rash or violent. There were pistols in his possession, and there were the dark waters of the Thames running close to his dingy office in the city, but he took advantage of none of these things. He only sat day after day at his desk, writing or reading law papers, drawing out documents, hearing of crime and contest and subterfuge; attending law courts; saying what he could not believe; plunging clients into perplexity—plunging antagonists into still greater perplexity when he could do so expertly; and, while he wrote, and talked, and argued—mystifying witnesses—sharpening the edge of his cunning for professional purposes—nobody knew that his eyes, so shrewd-looking at business times,

were dimmed for many a weary hour in the dead of night by tears most bitter, wrung from a heart that sorrowed daily. No one of all he met in his every day walk of life knew that the sunshine of his existence had suffered a frightful eclipse ; neither did he know anything of the inner griefs of those who composed the jostling crowd around him. He did not know that the little lawyer, older and sharper-eyed, and more cunning than himself, who was as often engaged against him as in partnership with him, had suffered just as he was now suffering, long years ago, and that was why he had never married, and seemed so hard and unloving and eccentric, with a face like a parchment sheet. The Searcher of Hearts alone can fathom the depths of human sufferings ; for man does not trust his fellow-man. Each poor mortal seeks to conceal his weakness from the eye of his weak brother, and so the world goes on from day to day, with men in great cities hurrying

by, passing and meeting each other with haughty frowns of distrust on their brows, mutually presenting a mailed and masked aspect, impossible to see through; yet, if the disguise was thrown aside, how much alike all would appear! Nobody need then be ashamed of his own imperfections, since they would only be counterparts of those borne by all around him. Tom was not singular in his misery—alas! no. But men must work and suffer in silence, just as romance writers say women must. God alone can tell how many men are refused by the women they have loved to distraction. He alone can tell how many male hearts are broken—how many lives blighted in youth and middle age. Away with the trashy jargon about woman's love—woman's faith—woman's secret heart-mourning; give each sex its due and nothing more. Let truth be established. Let any reader pause now, and consider—of his acquaintances, and the acquaintances

of his parents—how many men and women among them have suffered fatally from love disappointments. Have the blighted women preponderated over the blighted men? Not within our own sphere of observation, reader—certainly not. We know of one woman, now growing aged, who was a belle in youth, and whose lover abandoned her after all was arranged for their marriage. Well, she suffered, no doubt, poignantly; but she is well-nigh seventy, and still actively engaged in religious pursuits. We knew another, now gathered to her fathers, whose lover died on the eve of the wedding, and she lived to a hale old age, dying near her eightieth year. We knew another bordering on eighty, whose disappointments in love were numerous, and she lives a cheerful life, somewhat secluded, but by no means dreary. We rarely heard of one who died or pined away from love-grief. But we knew of men who have rushed into dis-

sipation to drown such sorrow—abandoning the society of respectable women for ever; we have even known of some seeking death on the battle field to rid them of a life too hard to bear. Sometimes have we been told—“ Oh, he never held up his head after she refused him—he got consumption and died;” or “ Oh, she broke his heart—if ever heart could be broken—he never was the same since the day she married so and so.” The fact of it is, women rarely love to one quarter of the distraction or depth that they are so generally given credit for; many women are brought up never to dream of either loving or being loved, and it is as well they do not. Men flatter themselves perhaps rather too much upon this subject—they forget that women are from their earliest years taught to crush nearly all the natural feelings of the heart. We are sorry to say this, but we like honesty, and detest humbug as much as did our friend Tom Ryder. We will

never agree to the maudlin notion that women are all ready to be heartbroken and sacrificed on the altar of love, while men rush along through life, deceiving and making victims—regarding love as a pastime—a play—and only thinking seriously of worldly pursuits, fame, honour, and glory—never, as long as we believe that nearly every man of twenty and upwards is thinking seriously of love and marriage every day of his life; and that when he is blighted and disappointed he must hide his care, and go on smoking cigars, attending theatres, and his sober duties, just as if nothing had happened; in the same way that his sister, when her lover deserts her, goes on working her fancy work, singing duets, visiting her friends, feeling very sorry, of course, but bearing up, nevertheless, wonderfully. Men and women alike suffer their love disappointments generally in silence; of all sorrows they are the last that the mourner likes to speak of, and

perhaps this may be one reason that they prey sometimes so heavily.

Tom Ryder never confided to his parents or his sisters the bitter grief at his heart; but when Christmas came he refused to spend it at Yaxley. He dared not go there and see the dark woods of Meiklam's Rest stretching away in the neighbourhood—and listen to the cawing of the rooks soaring in great bodies to their homes among those old trees. No; Christmas must be a sad time to him in any place, but saddest of all at Yaxley; for Tom only connected the precious anniversary with thoughts of fun and jollity, and not with the birth of the Man of Sorrows, acquainted with grief, who suffered agony that we might rejoice for ever.

Tom rather considered Christmas as having reference to a large plum pudding—an extra fine dinner, health-drinking, and dancing merrily; so he preferred staying in London amid fog, and

smoke, and strange faces, and passing the great festive day all alone in his lodgings, with the chimes from all the churches ringing in his ears.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE WRONG PART OF THE LETTER.

AND Lizette Stutzer had thrown away a good offer of marriage—she, a penniless girl, with no home—no relatives—no friends. Miss Pilmer was surprised and annoyed when she heard it; for, like too many women in the world, she thought liking or disliking had not much to do with matrimony and settling in life. Tom Ryder himself was put out of the question entirely; nothing occurred to her mind but the idea of her friend having refused seven or eight hundred a-year, a comfortable establishment, and respect-

able connexions. She did not reflect that such advantages might be dearly paid for by having to live year after year with a person distasteful and uncared for—a person whose presence could neither cheer nor please. Whether Bessie thought of these things in regarding her own approaching union was only known to herself; but in Lizette's case she could take very practical views—thinking only of the money and settlements, and ignoring the man completely. Oh, ye short-sighted mortals, who seek to preserve the past and present system of things in keeping women dependent as they are, ye know not the wrong done thus to men—often the greatest sufferers in the end!

“I must say you were very foolish, Lizette,” said Bessie, losing all patience. “I used to feel quite happy thinking of your being married and provided for, and now I am cast down completely.”

“But you forget always, dear Bessie, that I did not love Mr. Ryder in the least—in fact, I rather disliked him—though I pitied him greatly during our last interview; but I never could endure to live in the house with him—it would have been impossible.”

“Ah, that is all nonsense, Lizette. How do half the women in the world do who have no fortunes? Hundreds of girls would have accepted Tom Ryder at a day’s notice. Would marrying him be as disagreeable as teaching bold brats of children, or doing needlework for hire, or being employed in any of the low ways of earning bread that are alone open to women?”

“Marrying him would be to me worse than beggary!” said Lizette ardently, her eyes filling with tears. “I do not believe any woman with a spark of feeling would marry a person she cared so little for as I cared for Tom Ryder.”

“There must be very little feeling among

women, if your belief is correct," said Bessie with the slightest *souçon* of sarcasm in her tone. "Do you mean to say that the thousands of girls who marry from year to year are all desperately in love with the men that happen to propose for them, and that if such is not the case, these girls must necessarily have no hearts—no feeling? You are quite ridiculous, Lizette—unfit for everyday life. People would laugh at your ideas of love and matrimony; they would say you were quite simple. You have yet to learn that most women cannot *afford* to have likings and dislikings—they must just put their romance, and feeling, and all inconvenient sentiment out of the way, and take what they can get! In fact, you know, in some countries it is thought quite indelicate for a woman to have any preference!"

"You insult men by such opinions, Bessie. Is it not injustice to them to uphold the system that makes them merely preservatives from want for

women. What domestic happiness can they enjoy if married merely for their money or position in society?"

"Oh, that is their own affair," observed Miss Pilmer, coolly; "most of them like dependent, half-witted sort of wives, and so they get simpering, silly creatures, whose mothers have done all the cunning and manœuvring for them, and then they get cunning in time themselves, and the same business is acted over and over from generation to generation. But this is going away from the point in question. I shall never cease scolding you about this wilful loss of a thousand a year, and everything desirable, and I should have made Sir James employ Mr. Ryder in every law affair, and perhaps act as the family lawyer and agent at Darktrees. Oh, what a sad disappointment this is!"

Poor Lizette at last began to weep, and then Bessie softened towards her, and kissed her, and

said she would pardon her for this time, but never again on any future similar occasion.

Mrs. Pilmer had now a tangible reason for openly condemning Miss Stutzer's folly, even to her face. The poor girl was sneered at and insulted till she felt truly humbled and wretched, but never sorry for the cause of all this ill-humour and fretfulness. Never once did she feel inclined to repent having refused Tom Ryder.

About this time Miss Pilmer received a long and confidential letter from her cousin, written on board ship. Some of its contents rather surprised her. Knowing that Lizette would feel interested in his movements, and his letter being, moreover, an amusing one, she kindly handed it to her, having abstracted, as she thought, the portion of it which had surprised her, and which was intended by the writer to be perfectly confidential. But, unfortunately, in a hurry, she abstracted a wrong sheet, and thus the part of the epistle,

not intended for Lizette's eyes, fell into her possession by a strange mischance.

Miss Stutzer was alone in her room when she read the letter. There was a long and vivid description of events and scenes, which a lively, clever pen could alone have invested with importance and interest, and Lizette was much amused till she came to the portion which neither Dillon nor Bessie intended for her perusal. She read these words, which seemed to dance and flicker in a yellow glare before her eyes :—

“ And now, dear Bessie, you remember I promised to make you a *confidante*, and inform you of all my difficulties and perplexities, so that I feel it my bounden duty to tell you something that I know will make you laugh ; and glad I am to be far away from your merry eye while I make the humble confession. At the same time, I assure you the matter has not been a laughable one to myself. Here I dash at it at once, then. Will

you be surprised to hear that I was seriously in love with Lizette Stutzer?—aye, seriously, and at last, desperately. Only for the flirtation between her and Ryder, and the assertions you made that she liked him, and Luke Bagly's telling Foster how they had been love-making for so many years, I would, most certainly, have rushed impetuously into a declaration before leaving England. Do not, however, imagine that I would have been imprudent enough to think of marrying at once. I should have waited till I got my company ; but I would have asked Lizette to engage herself before we parted. Sometimes I was mad enough to fancy she actually cared for me!—how we deceive and flatter ourselves!—and she all the time dreaming of poor Tom. Well, I hope I won't break the tenth commandment. I trust sincerely Ryder will make her happy. She deserves that her lot should be cast among the fortunate of the earth. After all, we can school our

feelings, and thrash them into obedience to our reason. About the time I embarked at Southampton, I felt apprehensive that I should die of a broken heart—now spare your merriment, Miss Bessie!—but I rallied marvellously. I said to myself, ‘Come, old fellow, the girl is not for you; she has given her affections to some one else, and you would be a fool to continue thinking of her—perhaps worse than a fool; give it up on the spot!’ So it all came right by degrees. Instead of thinking every moment, I only think now two or three times a day of her, and I am growing tranquil. I look at that magic ring her father gave me, and I feel strength to resist temptation; it has saved me many and many times before from folly and error. Poor Paul Stutzer! He must have been a rare being to have had such influence on a boy, for a boy can often see through character more clearly than a man. Depend upon it that the teachers who fail to gain the confidence

and goodwill of their general pupils are, more or less, *humbugs*—if you will excuse my using an inelegant, but expressive, word.

“I write this on a separate sheet that you may abstract it from the public part of the letter Burn it most carefully.”

Poor Lizette! Long did she stand there petrified. She had read on, without stopping to reflect whether she was doing right or wrong. Drops of ice seemed falling on her heart; her brain was giddy; her whole frame trembling. When her emotion somewhat subsided she folded up the sheets of the letter and put them into the envelope, which she then carried to Bessie's room, leaving it on her dressing-table. She determined not to speak of the matter unless Bessie did so first. She felt sure Miss Pilmer must have intended to abstract that fatal sheet, as Dillon had desired her, for she missed one part of his letter, the loss of which rendered some of his descrip-

tions apparently abrupt and unfinished. Thus she knew her friend had made a great mistake.

“What shall I do when she discovers it?” she thought. “How shall I look?” And she walked up and down her room troubled and agitated. When Bessie should come home from her drive with Sir James Bend, how unutterable must be her confusion! Oh, it was agonizing to contemplate!

CHAPTER XX.

LUKE BAGLY AGAIN.

MISS PILMER did not return till very late, Sir James having driven her far that day. In the meantime luncheon was ready, and, as, usual, Lizette was summoned down stairs. It was still little more than a week since her rejection of Tom Ryder; and Mrs. Pilmer was yet disposed to be very sharp and uncivil. Upon this day a favourable opportunity had occurred of "opening her whole mind," as her daughter was absent, thus relieving her of the check which she often

was upon her respecting Lizette. After luncheon, which had passed in an ominous silence, and while Miss Stutzer was still pale and trembling from the effects of what she had so lately read in Dillon Crosbie's letter, Mrs. Pilmer commenced to speak in a cold, hard voice :

“ I suppose you have been making up your mind, Miss Stutzer, as to what your views for the future are, as my daughter and I leave England almost immediately, and this house is to be shut up and left in care of the housekeeper.”

Lizette faintly replied that she had long been wishing to commence earning her livelihood—not speaking thus faintly because she was mortified at being addressed in such a way, but because the present nervous state of her feelings rendered the effort to utter words of any kind very difficult. Her apparent agitation provoked Mrs. Pilmer exceedingly.

“ You talk very coolly of earning your bread.

If it is so easy to do so, why did you not try it before?"

"Miss Pilmer was kind enough to ask me to remain here, and I did so at her request."

"Oh, very nice talking, indeed! By-and-by, no doubt, you will say she ruined your prospects, forcing you to stay here against your will. I know the ingratitude of the world, and its misconceptions and deceits. Even if Miss Pilmer asked you out of politeness to remain here, you need not have accepted the offer, and then accused her of putting a stop to your seeking a livelihood."

"You quite misunderstand me. I am most grateful to Miss Pilmer. I shall never forget her kindness."

"Oh, of course not—nor the cruelty of everyone else, I suppose! No one is to be thanked but Miss Pilmer!"

"I am indebted to you all!" said poor Lizette, humbly.

“Do stop such set phrases and speak plainly. I don’t want flattery nor thanks. I want some common sense conversation. Are you now ready to take any employment that turns up for you?”

“Quite ready. I shall be most happy to accept anything suitable to me.”

“Suitable or unsuitable, you may be glad to get anything at all to do. You know the old saying, ‘Beggars are not to be choosers.’ What, then, are your views for the future?”

“I think I might endeavour to get a situation as governess in some family.”

“And who is to recommend you for it?”

“I hoped that you might be kind enough to speak for me to some acquaintances in London.”

“*I!* really you flattered yourself! I, indeed! What do I know of your acquirements or your character? Very sorry, indeed, I am to hear some most unpleasant accounts of your conduct at Yaxley, from that respectable man, Luke

Bagly. He does not say they were true, nor do I say it; but that makes very little difference to the world. A woman's reputation is of such a delicate fabric that the breath of slander destroys it. False or true, an ill report has always power to injure her deeply. I could not now take upon me to recommend you to any respectable family as a governess; my own character would suffer if I did. They would hear of these reports at Yaxley and consider me as culpable as yourself. Do not think I believe one word of them. You may have been thoughtless; but I exempt you entirely from any idea of serious imprudence. Yet, still, the reports exist; and it is most unfortunate."

All at once, Lizette's eyes flashed.

"And do you, as a woman, as a mother, think you would be justified in abandoning any young girl thus slandered falsely—in such a dilemma as I now stand in?" she asked, looking full in Mrs.

Pilmer's face, till the woman's eye quailed before that indignant gaze. "But I do not despair, Mrs. Pilmer; I do not believe that God will abandon me. Truth will prevail over falsehood; and I ask not your countenance or assistance any farther."

"Very grateful, certainly. Perhaps you think Mr. Ryder will propose again for you, or that you may fly to his protection and his home, without waiting to be asked any more. I dare say he would not deny you a refuge on any terms."

Passion alone could have prompted Mrs. Pilmer to utter those words. She was sorry for them as soon as spoken.

"Are you not ashamed to insult me in this way?" demanded Lizette, gathering a strange courage from the strength of her indignation. "I may be poor and friendless, Mrs. Pilmer, but I will not bear such language addressed to me. For your own sake as well as mine, I must resist such barbarity."

“ Oh ! then you threaten me, you little viper ? How dare you rise up and address me so to my face—here all alone as I am—widowed and a mourner, so lately, too ? Oh ! what ‘a world it is. Oh ! Mrs. Meiklam, when you warmed this serpent in your bosom, did you intend it to strike its fangs in me ? Oh ! you ungrateful, cruel, barefaced child of a villain and an impostor, leave my house for ever ! The walls that shelter you cannot be sanctified. I believe now you have well earned the reports at Yaxley. I believe you to be everything—ay, perhaps worse ——”

“ Stay,” interrupted the girl, approaching her, and laying her hand firmly on her arm—“ have a care, Mrs. Pilmer ; you must not *dare* to speak thus to me. I will not permit it ; I will leave your house ; I will rid you of my company, but I will suffer no further insult. There are some things I will not, and ought not to bear !”

Mrs. Pilmer was by no means of an hysterical

nature, but at present she thought it would be well to fall into a state of excited feeling, likely to terrify the impertinent girl, who had so astonished her by rising up at last against tyranny and insult. Poor Lizette was soon worn out by the little flame of spirit that had burned within her for so short a time. Her face was of a death-like paleness, her large eyes beaming intensely, when Mrs. Pilmer began rocking herself to and fro, moaning out plaintively—

“Oh! dear—oh! dear. To be thus threatened, and seized hold of, and alarmed at my own table; to be attacked as if I were a common fishwoman at Billingsgate; to be told that my kindness was barbarity—that I must not ‘*dare*’ to open my lips in my own house! Oh! did I dream of ever being so insulted. Oh! if I was not a widow, it never would have happened. But no protector—not even my nephew to stand by me!”

And she wailed and clapped her hands always

the louder when Lizette, terrified, indeed, sought to soothe her, and brought her wine, forcing it to her lips, till at length she tottered from the room, having worked herself up into an actual belief in the reality of her wrongs, and of Miss Stutzer's awful, even violent, behaviour to her. Poor Lizette half believed herself to be guilty also. Why had she not held her peace, and quitted the place quietly? Oh! why had Tom Ryder ever thought of her? Why had she seen that letter of Dillon Crosbie's? Such a confusion of ideas as overwhelmed her, as she hurried up and down the large dining-room. She was so much alarmed about Mrs. Pilmer's state that she forgot her distress, lest Bessie should discover that she had read the wrong part of that fatal letter, and it was only when the carriage returned that she recollected what cause she had to dread meeting Miss Pilmer. However, her alarm on this head was groundless. Bessie never discovered her

mistake about Dillon's epistle. She saw it lying on her table where Lizette had left it, and, being in a hurry dressing for dinner, she took it up, pressed her lips to the direction, and tossed it into a drawer, where it lay for a long time afterwards without being disturbed. Mrs. Pilmer refused to leave her room that evening ; she would not appear at dinner, and she called up Sir James Bend and her daughter to tell them she would never set foot below stairs while Miss Stutzer remained under her roof.

Late that evening Luke Bagly called at Markham House to ask if he could speak a few words in private with Mrs. Pilmer, who was reported to be unable to see him ; but he did not leave the hall until he had received permission to hold an interview with her next evening, as he had something "*very particular to say to her.*"

CHAPTER XXI.

COMING AMONG THOUSANDS.

WHEN Bessie came down stairs after seeing her mother, and hearing that lady's account of Miss Stutzer's extraordinary behaviour at luncheon-time, she naturally felt inclined to look coldly upon Lizette, and to speak to her with dignity.

"I am sorry you allowed your temper to overcome your judgment," she said gravely. "I know mamma is often provoking and unreasonable—often apt to say even what she does not think ;

but still nothing could justify your insulting her, and grasping her rudely by the arm, and making her shed tears."

"Mrs. Pilmer forgets—I may have been hasty, but I said nothing at all of an insulting character. I asked her certainly in my indignation if she was not ashamed to insult *me* as she did. Oh, Bessie! you know not what it is to be alone in the world and slandered, with insult upon insult heaped upon you, and expected to bear it all patiently," exclaimed Lizette, bitterly. "I may have been wrong, but I was roused beyond endurance."

"You should have recollected that you were speaking to *my* mother," said Bessie, a little haughtily.

"I recollected nothing but my indignation that any woman could so address another as she addressed me. Forgive me, Bessie. Oh! for God's sake, do not look coldly on me—*you*, my only friend in the whole world!" exclaimed the

wretched girl, looking so wild that Bessie was surprised.

“ I have always wished to befriend you,” continued Miss Pilmer; “ but I fear I have been mistaken in you. I could not have believed you capable of behaving so strangely to mamma, had a stranger told me so. But you do not deny it—you do not say you are sorry for your conduct.”

“ Of what am I accused ?”

“ Did you tell mamma she must not ‘*dare*’ to speak before you ?”

“ I told her she must not dare to speak as she was *then* speaking.”

“ Well, and can anything excuse such a liberty ? What could have provoked you to use such language ?”

“ Her own words. She said what I should be ashamed to repeat,” and a red glow flitted over the girl’s face. “ Recollect, Bessie, that though

Mrs. Pilmer may be your mother, she has no right to behave barbarously to me."

"Take care, Lizette, how you speak of her in my hearing, however," said Miss Pilmer, with dignity. "Do not forget yourself altogether!"

Such words from Bessie !

The events of that day had been too much for Lizette. When Miss Pilmer concluded her last warning, the poor girl looked at her as in a dream. She saw her growing strangely large, and as though swaying backwards and forwards; the whole room seemed rocking to and fro. In another moment she was lying senseless in Bessie's arms, with great tears falling on her. How thin and frail that inanimate form was ! The tiny hands worn and fleshless—the pale cheeks almost hollow from care and grief, such grief as Bessie could not comprehend—the weight of the slender figure so light ! And that tender, delicate girl

to be turned out upon the world ! But it must not be. Had not Bessie *some* money still at her disposal — enough to give the poor child an annuity, however small, to keep her from want Her marriage settlement had not absorbed all her fortune. Thank God, no. Something must be done at once, for away from Markham Lizette certainly must go—perhaps to morrow—perhaps next day. In a week Bessie herself would be in Italy—far from England.

With much kindness Miss Pilmer chafed the young girl's hands, and endeavoured to restore her to consciousness. It was long before she rallied ; her faint was still and death-like, but recovery arrived eventually, and then Bessie asked her forgiveness, and received a full and grateful pardon. Lizette told her she honoured her for defending her mother's cause, even though she was mistaken as to the provocation given and received by herself. Ill from excitement and dis-

tress of many kinds, Miss Stutzer was obliged to retire to her room, which she did not leave all the next day. Most thankfully she listened to Bessie's proposal, of allowing her thirty pounds a year, certainly, from her own private purse, with a promise of increase after a little time. With this sum she might be able to board and lodge for the present, with some respectable family of small means, till she could find sources of employment, for Lizette was determined not to be idle. While they thus talked, neither of the young girls knew that, already, among all the thousands of letters speeding at that moment to the mighty Post-office of London, there was one of such importance to one of them, that all these promises and plans would be rendered null and void; of no account whatever. Mighty Post-office! What a burden you issue daily of written joys and sorrows; what messages of death and life! of despair and rejoicing!

The winter day closed in ; and, when the dusky hour of appointment drew near, Luke Bagly rang the hall-door bell of Markham House, and was admitted without question.

CHAPTER XXII.

APPROACHING NEARER.

LUKE BAGLY had already been three weeks in London, and, during that time he had been often in consultation with attorneys, who knew neither his name, nor where he came from. He had asked their advice upon a certain subject, and he had received it. Once, by a strange chance, he applied at the office of Tom Ryder; but they merely exchanged a cold greeting, and nothing more. He did not demand six-and-eightpence worth of advice from *that* young lawyer, who was

glad enough to have nothing to do with him. Luke had lost nothing of his old hankering after the law. He was out of employment since Mrs. Meiklam's death. Nothing equal to the situation he had held at the Rest had been offered, or was likely to be offered to him. Thoroughly spoiled by indulgence, with all his tyranny and overbearing qualities—his dishonesty and subtlety—this man would have found it, indeed, hard to secure such a place as he had lately lost.

Firm in her resolve of remaining up stairs as long as Miss Stutzer stayed in the house, Mrs. Pilmer received Bagly in her daughter's *boudoir*; she felt a little surprised at his seeking an interview with her, for what could he possibly have to communicate now, six months after his dismissal from the place which was formerly of mutual interest to both?

“Good evening, Bagly,” said she, as he entered, looking rather out of place in that ele-

gant apartment, with his large, rough over-coat, that over-coat so often envied him by the shivering, ill-clad, fire-wood seekers in the Rest woods; and his heavy boots, that creaked and tramped in spite of his efforts to move softly.

“Good evening, ma’am; sorry to hear you were ill, but glad to see you looking so well; very glad indeed.”

“You said you had something particular to say to me,” observed Mrs. Pilmer, who was not disposed to be so kind to the ex-steward as formerly, when he was in office; so she cut his civil prelude short.

“Yes, ma’am; a little matter that has become known to me, brings me here this evening—not so small a matter either—one that I fear will be unfortunate for you and Miss Pilmer.”

“How?” asked the lady, looking inquiringly at the man, but not, in the least, alarmed.

“Mrs. Pilmer, you know how I always re-

spected you and your family—everyone, indeed, connected with my honoured mistress, now deceased, and for all the world I wouldn't wish to put you to trouble, Gods knows I wouldn't! The ups and downs of life, and the disappointments, we sinners here below are subject to, is fearful to dwell on, ma'am; it is, indeed. When I listen to sermons and read the Scripture, I can't help wondering how we go on from day to day a-sinning away as if there wasn't such a thing in the earthly sphere as death or burial."

" Well, I think I know all that, Bagly, pretty well, myself," said Mrs. Pilmer, who in past years at Yaxley, had always permitted Luke to philosophize and lecture to his heart's content when abusing her nephew, Dillon Crosbie, and recommending his removal from that neighbourhood.

" Oh, most certain you do, my lady; you were always well read and up to everything. Mr. Hilbert often said to me, ' Luke, you're an honest

man, and a 'cute one, and you know well there isn't a woman—a lady, I mean to say—equal for Scripture and pious learning to Mrs. Pilmer.' He said that often."

"What do you wish to tell me, this evening?" demanded the lady, coldly.

"A little matter, as I said—indeed, a great matter, I fear—very confusing and perplexing, now, especially as I believe the young lady is about to be married and the settlements drawn up, and all."

"I really do not understand you, Bagly—what *do* you mean?"

The man turned round to see if the door was fast closed, and then, being satisfied that it was, he creaked softly across the room till he stood near to the lady. Had she been a nervous person, she would have started; but she was not. She merely looked sharply to see if he had any weapon in his hand; yes, with an instinctive feeling, not

to be accounted for, she looked to see *that*. Bagly might talk of Scripture, and express wonder that people would go on from day to day “a-sinning,” and such like sentiments; yet Mrs. Pilmer just glanced to assure herself that there was no knife within reach of her, as he made that cautious movement towards her. No one could have detected the slightest shade of doubt or fear crossing her face; she might go into hysterics (?) because a small hand had dared to lay itself on her arm—when a girl, scarcely more powerful than a child, had presumed to resist, by words, oppression and insult; but she could bravely stand her ground without flinching, even with the thought of *murder* flashing through her mind, as the ex-steward approached her.

“Well, Bagly?” she said, in a steady voice, as he stood silently beside her.

“I’m afraid to speak out bold, ma’am—I dread to wound your feelings,” he said, in a low tone.

“Is it anything about Sir James Bend?” asked the lady; and now her voice trembled a very little.

“No, ma’am; nothing about him exactly—though, no doubt, it may concern him in the long run. It’s about my late respected and beloved mistress—Mrs. Meiklam’s last will and testament.”

“She made no will,” returned Mrs. Pilmer, growing posed, at length. “You must know she died without one.”

“She didn’t,” said Bagly, shaking his head, solemnly; “*she left a will, and it’s found.*”

“*Found!*” echoed Mrs. Pilmer, now turning pale.

“It’s found.”

The lady was unable to speak for one or two seconds.

“Do not believe the report, Bagly; it is all nonsense. If it *was* found, I should be glad;

but I am sure it is not; who could find it? You know it is an impossibility."

"It's found, ma'am, I swear it to you, and here's a fair copy of it, drawn out by my own hand, correct in every sentence."

Mrs. Pilmer stretched forth her hand and received the document given to her; she drew the lamp near to her; her fingers did not tremble; but there was a coldness stealing over her heart.

Luke never could have written out those phrases from his own invention—were they not orthodox law terms, as far as she could judge? There was before her the whole written disposal of Mrs. Meiklam's property—not very elaborate, but short, concise, simple. The people named were few, but much was left in the power of the residuary and chief legatee. Luke Bagly himself was noted down to receive *three hundred pounds*, and that was the only thing that staggered the

acute lady in her belief that the copy of the will was correct.

“ I’m a poor man, out of place, and all that—but, on my honour, Mrs. Pilmer, rather than fret you, or put Miss Bessie to any distress, I’d never open my lips to mortal about that will. What’s the use of it? What nobody expects they don’t miss. Mrs. Meiklam may have been a kind, good lady, but no doubt she was foolish now and again, as that will testifies; and then to think of the talk and the fuss there would naturally be, and the altering of the marriage settlements. Oh, I’d rather than any money save you from such ignominy, ma’am.”

Sharply and shrewdly Mrs. Pilmer eyed Bagly’s face—their eyes met, and the more subtle of the two read the thoughts of the other. Frightful temptation, coming at such a moment!

It was late when that interview terminated

—when silence was purchased at a dear price—though the purchaser felt uncertain of the bargain. Guilty, conscience-stricken, doubtful—yet fearful of seeking certainty; filled with a strange hope that, after all, she might be only duped.

The wild wind of the wintry night swept coldly over London and its suburbs, and nearer and nearer was approaching a mail train, flashing by in the midnight hour, from a northerly point, bearing, amid its burdens of many kinds, that momentous letter, to be delivered at its destination in the morning.

CHAPTER XXIII.

MRS. PILMER RECEIVES A LETTER.

It had been arranged that Lizette should leave Markham next day. Miss Pilmer's maid knew of a respectable person, in reduced circumstances, who was willing to receive the young lady as a boarder in her house, somewhere in the neighbourhood of Shooter's Hill; and thither it was settled she was to repair the following afternoon. Messages had been despatched to and from this woman, who was the widow of a physician, and Bessie was satisfied with the arrangements en-

tered into. Both she and Lizette sat up all that night talking and packing up ; and many were the presents of valuable things bestowed by the wealthy heiress on her friend—trinkets, dresses, books, all lavished upon the receiver with a carelessness almost reckless, as Bessie said more than once—

“ Do not thank me. I like to give away what I possessed in old times. I shall not bring to Darktrees a single ornament or dress I ever wore before. My life will commence anew ; old recollections must be buried for ever.”

“ But you will not forget me, dear Bessie ? ”

“ Oh, never ! I do not mean that. Never mind what I say, Lizette ; I speak at random. Just think, Luke Bagly has been closeted with mamma for no end of time this evening. Do you know I never liked that man at Yaxley. He was always making complaints of my dear cousin, Dillon ; and then he hung a dear little dog that

I was so fond of, because it snapped at him. Mrs. Meiklam never knew it, for nobody dared to tell her, and the poor animal was thought to have gone astray."

"I did not like Luke, either," said Lizette; but it was only just before Mrs. Meiklam's death I found out how impertinent he could be."

"But I believe he was most honest and upright and all that. Honest people are always hateful."

"I do not think so, Bessie."

"Well, Luke was hateful anyway, with his great fussiness about attending to Mrs. Meiklam's interests, and tyrannizing over the poor thieving wretches that stole hares or firewood. I couldn't bear him. I wish people could be upright without being so disagreeable. Once he and old Jenny Black had a dreadful quarrel, and Dillon took Jenny's side, and I happened to say something that vexed her, and she cursed me in most fear-

ful language. It was all Luke's fault, for I was afraid he would strike Dillon, and then I knew there would be terrible work at the Rest, and I wanted to put a stop to the quarrelling. I often think of that curse, Lizette, and I dream—oh! so often—of Jenny Black. Are you at all superstitious, Lizette?"

"No, not in the least."

"And yet there were witches in the Bible. I believe in the influence of evil eyes, and in death-warnings, and a great many ghostly things."

"How can you talk so, you who are educated so well?"

"Some people are too prosy to be under the influence of the spiritual; but all are not so. I am convinced that there are still people destined by Providence to see as clearly into the future as ever there were in olden times. There, do not stare at me; but I see you are one of the prosy people who have no communion with the ghostly."

Bessie could not give up her old delight of surprising her sober friend by expressing strange sentiments, half in jest, half in earnest. The hours of the night wore on while they talked, and it was not till the grey dawn of the winter morning stole over the sky that both laid them down to rest. While they slept heavily, with all the house astir, and the outward world busy, the post arrived. Letters were opened by Mrs. Pilmer, and one in particular she felt for an instant inclined to put in her pocket and say nothing about ; but she could not be so dishonourable and unjust. She would give it to her daughter when she saw her that day. She knew Miss Stutzer was to have left Markham before night but she did not know that Bessie was to have given her twenty pounds before her departure took place. She only knew she had intended herself to send her ten sovereigns by her maid, and never to see her more ; but, now, all this

was to be changed—Lizette could not go from the house that day, nor the next, nor the next.

Mrs. Pilmer had never closed her eyes all through the past night. Like her daughter she had been up and wakeful in all the hours of darkness and silence; but, unlike her, she never lay down or slept when the morning dawned. As people advance in life their powers of watchfulness strengthen. Mrs. Pilmer scarcely felt at all fatigued from want of rest. Sharp-eyed, she sat alone in her dressing-room, reading over her letters, and banker's accounts, and stockbrokers' deeds of transfer, and now and then pulling out the unexpected epistle from its envelope and reading over it again.

At about two o'clock in the afternoon Bessie emerged from her apartment, and ran as usual to greet her mother—the first thing she did on getting up. It was her custom from childhood.

“My dear Bessie, how late you are up to-day!”

“Oh, yes, I overslept myself completely. Any news to-day?”

Her mother paused for a moment, only for a moment.

“Yes, I have received a curious letter. You may read it yourself.”

Miss Pilmer took the missive handed to her. It was written in a strange, old-fashioned hand; and when she had finished reading it she burst out laughing.

“Can it be an impostor’s letter?” she asked, folding it up, and looking amused and pleased.

“I do not know; but what end would it serve if it was? The young girl is not so precious.”

“No,” said Bessie, thoughtfully; “but we must answer it quickly, and make further in-

quiries. This will delay our leaving town for a few days longer. Poor Lizette! I am very glad. Dear mother, you look pale to-day. Have you slept well last night?"

"No; but I feel very well."

"I dreamed this morning that my marriage with Sir James was all broken off, and that I never, never was to leave you, my dearest mother," said Bessie, kissing her mother passionately.

"My dear child!" said Mrs. Pilmer, embracing her with ardour.

"And then I awoke, and found it all a shadow."

There was no commentary made upon these words—no questions asked or answered. No one said—

"And were you sorry when you found it was a dream?" and no one replied—"Oh, yes, very sorry; I wept."

Mother and daughter turned the conversation upon indifferent subjects ; but, before separating, Mrs. Pilmer made an unexpected proposal to Bessie, which she rejected most fixedly ; and it was only when her mother said, “ Sir James must decide the matter, as Bagly is to apply to him this very day,” that she felt the uselessness of saying any more—at present. She then went to inform Lizette of the contents of the curious letter that had arrived that morning.

Lizette was in her room, making her last preparations for departure ; she had locked her trunk and corded her bonnet-box.

CHAPTER XXIV.

UNEXPECTED NEWS.

LAUGHING and crying they read that letter often over; and as, perhaps, the reader would like to have a peep at it, we shall here transcribe it faithfully. It was directed to Mrs. Pilmer, and ran thus :

“MADAM,—Having received information, by chance, through a servant named Margaret Wolfe, who told me she had lived for many years at a place called Meiklam’s Rest, in ——shire, respec-

ting a girl called Lizette Stutzer, daughter of Paul Stutzer, a schoolmaster, now deceased, I now write to say, that the aforesaid girl, Lizette Stutzer, is my grandniece, the daughter of my niece, Frances Bromley, otherwise Stutzer, whom I once loved much; but she vexed me—she and her husband—and I gave them up for ever. However, being dead, I won't lose sight of the child, who I remember a little toddling thing—very troublesome, running into mischief; but I suppose she has now got sense, which her parents had not. I returned from the continent only a few years ago, where I lived a long while and repent it. I hear that my grandniece, Lizette Stutzer, having lived for many years with a Mrs. Meiklam, of the afore-mentioned Meiklam's Rest, was brought to London by your husband, Mr. Pilmer, lately dead, Margaret Wolfe says; and accordingly, I take the liberty of applying to you for further information touching

her. If she chooses to come and live with me, she will be very welcome at my house; but she need not expect to find grandeur or elegance under my roof; neither need she be looking for any money that I may leave her, beyond a few hundred pounds at my death, as I lost the greater part of my money by the roguery of a banker and the failure of a steam packet company; and nearly all that was left I sunk on my life at ten per cent. interest.

“I am anxious to see Lizette Stutzer. Of course I could not recognise her after our long separation, and no doubt she forgets me. If she bears me no ill-will, for once loving her mother and then hating her, she can come to me at once, and see an old relation, much interested in her. On hearing from you about her, and if she will agree to come, I will enclose £5 for the expenses of her journey; and an excellent man, named Simon Peggs, who was once a tenant of my own

(but those days are gone), will be leaving London for this neighbourhood in about eight days, who will prove a trustworthy escort for my grandniece. —I have the honour to be, Madam, your obedient servant,

“JANE BROMLEY.

“Lonehill, Clicksthorp, ——shire.”

When Lizette read this letter, some feelings that she could scarcely comprehend stole over her heart; but she knew that great joy was not uppermost among them. It seemed to her as if a world of the past was about to be opened before her. She had often thought of the unknown person for whom had been intended her father's unfinished letter, written for him by Dillon Crosbie on the day of his death; and being still in possession of that letter, which had been preserved by Mrs. Meiklam, she did not doubt that her grandaunt, Mrs. Jane Bromley, was that

hitherto mysterious individual. She was not unconscious of the advantage it would be to her to have the protection of a relative willing to shelter her; yet the letter bore evidence of the writer's eccentricity; and probably she might find herself very unhappy under her roof. Bessie said that, at all events, Mrs. Bromley was a frank old lady; and that it would be well if all elderly ladies and gentlemen would follow her example, in disclosing truthfully, during their lifetime, the correct amount of the money they intended to leave their relatives at their death, thus putting them out of suspense at once. And then, seeing that Lizette looked rather grave and troubled, she added seriously :

“ Do not be sad, dear Lizette. Wherever you may go you will have a firm friend in me; and never neglect to apply to me in any perplexity. I hope also that when I am settled at Darktrees, you will be one of my first visitors. If you and

your grandaunt do not agree well, tell me at once, and you will surely find assistance. I know well you have too good reason to believe that I am not likely to be a steady friend. I cannot excuse myself for neglecting to write to you in Mrs. Meiklam's lifetime; but I have been living for a long while in a turmoil—a wild, feverish life; I did not settle to anything, though at heart I never forgot my friends. I have been always a sad wayward being; but that is nearly over now. I will soon be married, and I must grow serious.”

When Lizette looked up to reply to her friend, she saw that tears were in her eyes, and certain it was that the beautiful white hand resting on her shoulder trembled nervously.

“Bessie, you have been kind to me—most kind!” she exclaimed, flinging herself into her friend's arms. “Never can I forget how much I owe to you.”

For some time both were agitated ; but Bessie recovered herself with one of those efforts she had of late schooled herself into making successfully ; and once again growing merry, laughed and amused Lizette till the latter had to smile and forget her care. The idea of the “ trustworthy escort,” Simon Peggs, particularly amused Miss Pilmer, but she did not like to touch upon this point openly in presence of Lizette, who was, however, herself inclined to think he would not be a very agreeable travelling companion. There was one gleam of comfort in her heart— she thought her old friend, Peggy Wolfe, must be either living with, or near, her grandaunt. It never entered her head to doubt the truth of that strange letter having been really written by a relative, as she knew her mother’s maiden name was Bromley, and that her father had hoped for some particular person to take care of herself when left a forlorn orphan. Bessie answered the

letter immediately; informing Mrs. Bromley that her grandniece would be happy to accept her invitation to visit Lone-hill, and she relieved Lizette's anxiety considerably by informing her that she would send her own maid with her to Clicksthorp, where she happened to have a relative at service, whom she could take the opportunity of seeing.

Before the conclusion of that day Miss Pilmer gave her friend a somewhat startling piece of information, which seemed to annoy her a good deal.

“Only think, Lizette, Sir James has actually engaged Luke Bagley as steward at Darktrees! He asked mamma to recommend him last night, and so she wrote to Sir James, all without my knowledge; and Bagly went off in a hurry this morning, offering himself for the situation, and he is to go there next week. It seems Sir James had no regular establishment at Darktrees, and

he is now making alterations among his people. He appears to have taken quite a sudden fancy to Bagly, who has been in consultation with him pretty often since he came to town; and mamma seems so distressed at the idea of my objecting to the arrangement that I do not like to mention my disapproval of it to Sir James. However, I can assure both Luke and his good master that I will not allow any such proceedings to be carried on as were allowed at Meiklam's Rest. Wherever I choose to be mistress, I will reign supreme in discountenancing all kinds of tyranny and overbearing treatment of inferiors."

"Bagly can make himself very disagreeable, I know well, Bessie; but you had better not make him your enemy—he is a dangerous person," said Lizette.

"Oh, I am not a coward. No one can terrify me, especially a person of his position. The more dangerous I thought him, the more I should

like to thwart him—I dislike so much to be imposed upon! Mamma was thinking he might travel with you instead of my maid as far as Clicksthorp, as I believe that is somewhere in the direction of the route to Darktrees.”

“Oh, I should not like to travel with him for anything!” exclaimed Lizette, eagerly. “I would much prefer going alone or with Simon Peggs.”

“And you really dislike Bagly so much,” said Bessie, musingly. “Poor mamma thinks he will be a comfort to me in my strange home; but most decidedly I feel as if something disastrous had occurred ever since I heard he was hired, and all perhaps without reason.”

Lizette knew, as far as she was concerned herself, that Bagly had behaved with palpable and unmitigated impertinence. She was aware he had injured her much at Yaxley. When Mrs, Meiklam was dead, every tongue so long silent, burst forth in condemnation of his cruelty, his

treachery, and cunning. Yet she knew that he had always really liked Miss Pilmer—she never heard him breathe a word against her, and perhaps he might serve her husband and herself faithfully. At all events, he was hired for six months *certainly*, and it might only lead to bad results if she influenced Bessie too much against him. She still must repeat to her, nevertheless, to beware how she made him her enemy, for there was not a more vindictive being than Luke Bagly. She knew that well, and she would like Bessie to know it too, and to profit by the knowledge as long as he might remain at Darktrees. But Miss Pilmer considered it rather absurd to think that a steward could have power to make himself disagreeable or dangerous to his employers; he might render himself so to his inferiors and the workpeople under his authority, but nothing beyond that. No; Bessie was not one of those tame-spirited individuals who would bear impo-

sition through dread of anything or any one. Luke Bagly would very soon know what her wishes were, and he must carry them out in all things. She was wealthy, and her husband would be indebted to her for a large fortune; and, surely, she had every right to have her voice heard in the formation of rules to govern the estate of which she had consented to become mistress.

CHAPTER XXV.

SIMON PEGGS.

MRS. BROMLEY wrote back again to Markham very speedily, on receipt of Miss Pilmer's letter, and this time she enclosed the promised £5, informing her grandniece that Simon Peggs would be ready to escort her from London on a certain day appointed and near at hand. Accordingly when the time arrived, Lizette was prepared to leave Markham, accompanied by Miss Pilmer's maid. When the hour came for Mr. Peggs to present

himself at the house he appeared punctually. He was a man about fifty, extremely short—standing in his boots, which had pretty long heels too, only five feet high; his head was very large, and his nose was likewise of inordinate dimensions; his eyes were small, but twinkling with a refulgence; his mouth was wide, and decidedly not handsomely formed. On the whole, the man boasted no beauty of outward form, and his dress and appearance denoted him to belong to that order of rank which ranges between the labouring classes and respectable country gentry. He was, in fact, a meritorious and hardworking man, who had risen from being a day-labourer to the possession, through his own industry, of a large farm and wealth considerable for his station in life. A certain air of self-importance, mingled with deep respect for the ladies in whose presence he was, pervaded his demeanour as he stood, hat in hand—a dim napless hat—awaiting Miss

Stutzer's pleasure to depart under his care. Respectful and respectable as he appeared, Lizette was, nevertheless, glad to have also the companionship of Miss Pilmer's maid. At the final moment of parting, Bessie pressed a pocketbook, containing a bank bill for £20, into the young girl's hand; but Mrs. Pilmer sent her neither message nor money—she was still relentless.

Mr. Peggs handed the young lady and the waiting woman into the cab at the door with much reverence, and then got in himself. He hardly spoke at all, and when Miss Stutzer addressed him, she was obliged to repeat everything she said three or four times over, as he was extremely deaf, which soon had the effect of reducing the party to perfect silence. On arriving at Euston-square, the travelling trio obtained places in the train starting in the direction for which they were bound, and Mr. Peggs

made himself useful in carefully looking after the luggage, never leaving it for an instant until he saw it safely stowed away in its proper place. Lizette and her female attendant occupied seats in a first-class carriage, but the good Simon either disposed of himself in a second or third-class carriage, as he vanished at once from view, not appearing again until the next station was reached and the train had stopped, when his remarkable and striking figure was observed by Miss Stutzer nearing her carriage, into which he peered carefully, looking round to assure himself that she and her companion were safe, and then vanishing again with great speed, for the twinkling eyes did their work very fast upon all occasions, to compensate probably for the slow sense of the ears. This process of looking for an instant into the young lady's carriage was repeated every time the train stopped at stations

on the way, and Lizette felt glad that Bessie was not with her to make her laugh outright, as she felt much inclined to do, even without the influencing effects of Miss Pilmer's sense of the ridiculous. Passengers in the same carriage with her, no doubt, wondered at the singular apparition of a large-headed dwarfish looking man, peering anxiously for an instant through the window at each halt, long or short, of the train, and then suddenly disappearing again with remarkable velocity; though, fortunately for Lizette, none could divine that the proceedings of Simon Peggs related to her; yet this ignorance of his motives only made his behaviour seem to wondering observers the more unaccountable and mysterious. Every one stared; some smiled, and perhaps one or two might have thought Mr. Peggs a madman, performing some imaginary self-inflicted penance. The journey was a long one and lasted many hours. It was

quite dark in the dull winter evening when our travellers reached the small town of Clicksthorp. Often during the day Lizette had felt nervous in thinking of her approaching meeting with the only relative of either parent that she had ever dreamed of. But still there was something wonderful in the conviction that she had at last been found out by a person to whom she was bound by the tie of kindred. No matter what her grandaunt was like, she must endeavour to love and cherish her; she must be old—perhaps infirm—perhaps bedridden—certainly at her age she would be in want of care. Bessie Pilmer's gift of twenty pounds was a great boon to Lizette; she felt quite rich—quite independent. Ah, none of us can afford to do without money in this world! Wherefore, then, should the weaker portion of mankind be so often plunged in dependence and want by the regulations and customs of a society supposed to be based on a Christian

foundation? This young girl felt that she could now *purchase* protection, since protection was so much needed by a woman. What could preserve her from snares and contamination, from insult and temptation, so well as the possession of money to pay for a home—money to pay for a respectable attendant—money to pay for a shelter from the wide, dark world, with its unfathomable depths of guilt and sin? This poor child felt a lightness of heart that she never could have experienced had she been travelling to those strange scenes of the north, even to meet a relation, without being mistress of any money. At the inn at Clicksthorp a singular looking vehicle of obsolete shape, drawn by one horse, was in waiting to convey Miss Stutzer to Lonehill, and Miss Pilmer's maid here parted with the young lady, intending to visit her relative that evening, and return to London next day.

Lizette entered the carriage waiting for her,

and Mr. Peggs, being a conscientious man, did not consider it right to abandon his protection of the young lady till she was safely delivered over to the guardianship of her grandaunt, and, therefore, he took his place beside the driver, while Lizette was allowed to remain in undisturbed possession of the place of distinction in the vehicle, which, however, being only covered partially by a head at the back, drawn out to its full dimensions, suffered the bitter evening blast to blow piercingly into her face. Some rather curious speculations were uppermost in her head as she drove along the black rough road to Lonehill ; and the stumbling manner in which the old horse, bearing her onwards, chose to perform his part of the journey, did not prove very exhilarating. Away the carriage went jolting, leaning sidewise, with a downward tendency, and at a most funereal pace, when suddenly there was a dead stop, just as the travellers were in the ascent of a rugged

hill. Lizette was alarmed as she beheld the driver dimly through the dusk, getting down and searching his pockets vigorously. What could he be doing? Was he searching for a knife? Could it be possible that she might be betrayed and murdered on this lonely road, with wild moors all around her? After thus rummaging in his pockets for a long while, the man suddenly started off in the direction of a cottage standing within view, shedding out a faint light from one solitary window. The idea of wayside robbers seized upon the girl's mind. Could Simon Peggs, that strange-looking individual, be the chief of a gang of thieves? She called to the suspected chief, demanding bravely what the stoppage was for; but Simon sat mutely on his elevated seat holding the reins—he neither heard nor answered her. Her alarms did not decrease, as she beheld the driver now approaching the carriage again, accompanied by two strange men, one bearing a

lantern, the other some pieces of strong cording. Surely she was not about to be strangled ! Thank Heaven, no ! It was only the harness that was the object of all these mysterious preparations — some part of it had given way. The driver explained to her that, having discovered he had forgotten to bring any rope with him, as he usually brought on a driving excursion, he was obliged to seek aid in his distress at the wayside cottage, concluding his address thus :—

“The people’s civil all round here ; they knows us and the carriage well, and so we’re never at a disshort when the harness smashes or the wheels get damaged.”

Lizette was at length satisfied that neither her money nor her life were to be demanded for this time, and she was considerably relieved when the old vehicle was once more upon its way, though now the horse went slower than before, going cautiously up hills, down slopes, and along level roads, till

the gate of Lonehill was reached. Up the avenue, the wheels went grating for some time, and at length as they were about to stop finally near the hall-door of the house, a loud and very angry manly voice was heard amid the darkness calling out :—

“ Holloa, Martin Hicks ! you great scoundrel, how dare you attempt to disobey my orders. You thought I should not see you, I suppose, going over the grass borders, so near those trees. How dare you not get down and lead the horse ! Wretch, do not think you will escape !”

Lizette was surprised, and perhaps a little offended, that any man about her grandaunt's place should thus salute her ears by such rough, uncourteous words, and she was wondering who the irascible gentleman could be, when to her astonishment the driver opened his lips to excuse himself humbly thus :—

“ Indeed, ma’am, I assure you I thought the carriage was quite far from the grass borders. I wouldn’t, on any account, disobey your commands.”

“ Hah, you rascal ! you and I must part. I’ll turn you off on the spot ! Yes, to-morrow morning you’ll have your discharge if I’m alive !” And, fuming with rage, the speaker looked on at the carriage as it made a darker blot on the darkness around.

Simon Peggs now got down and accosted the angry individual on the hall-door steps.

“ How do you do, Mrs. Bromley ? Hope you are very well, madam. I have brought the young lady to you, quite safe, and here she is.”

“ Ah, thank you, Simon,” said Mrs. Bromley, her wrath all at once subsiding. “ Where is my niece ? Holloa, you there inside ! bring out a candle—I can’t see anything.”

Lizette was assisted to alight by Simon Peggs, and, with a dizzy confused brain, she found herself clasped in the arms of somebody who seemed very large and strongly made.

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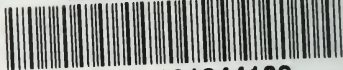
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